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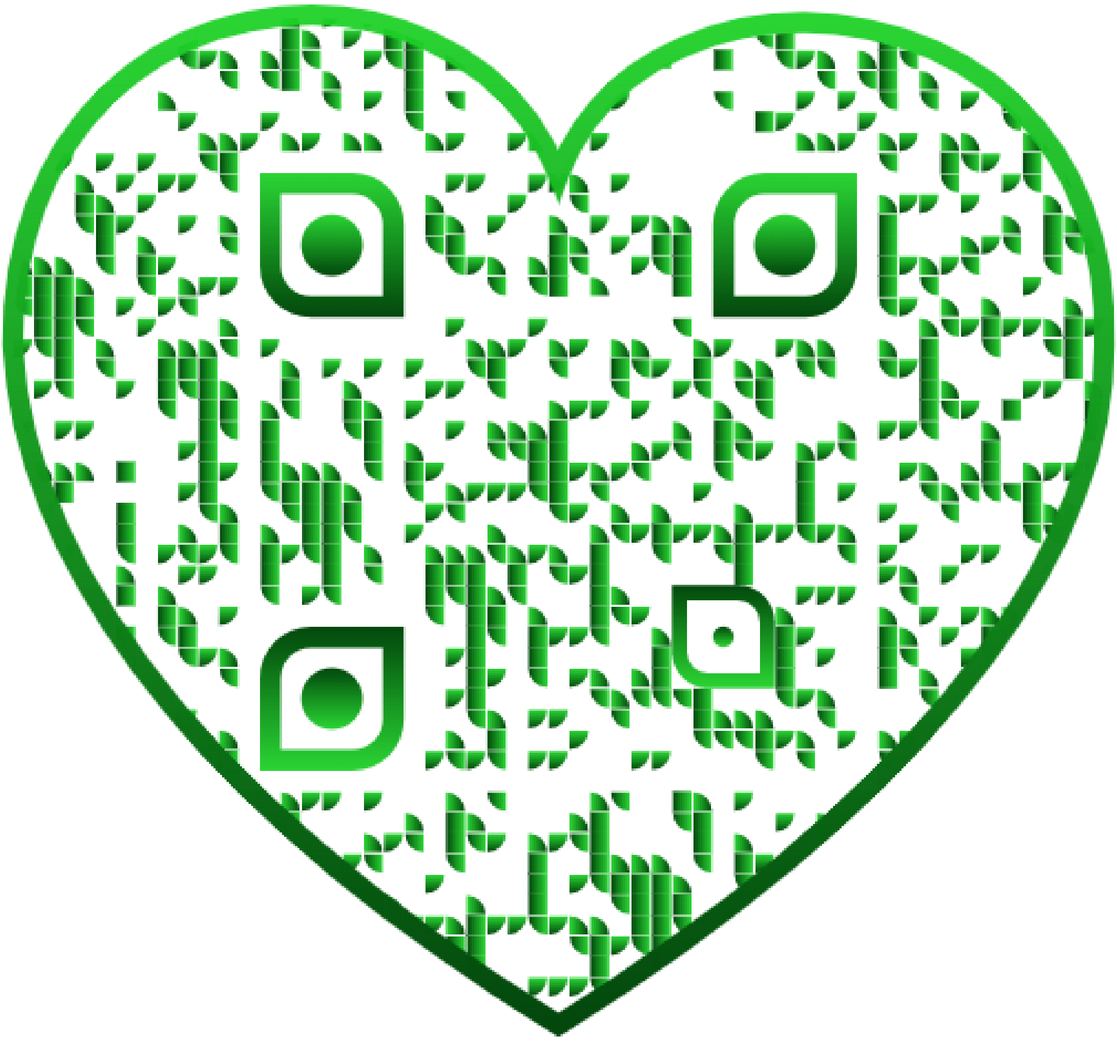

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WELCOME

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HELLO

We've enjoyed some glorious late spring weather over the last couple of months and I hope the sunshine has inspired you to get out in your campervan.

There's really nothing quite like relaxing outside your 'van on a warm afternoon and enjoying a cold glass of whatever takes your fancy. Or maybe you prefer to take a wander to the nearest beer garden and relax in the evening sunshine.

Either way, campervan adventures tend to be better when the weather is good, so hopefully the predictions of a long hot summer will come to pass!

With the summer holidays just around the corner you'll need to be quick if you want to get your perfect campsite and in this issue we've got some top tips to help you make the right choice. Have a look at **premierparks.outandaboutlive.co.u**k for details of some of the best sites in the country. And while you're online, our new-look website **outandaboutlive.co.uk** has all the latest campervan news, reviews and tips.

Happy campervanning!

Iain

IAIN DUFF | Editor

COVER PICTURE | Pembrokeshire, courtesy Drew Buckley/Alamy

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CONTENTS

JULY 2025

ROAD TRIPS

6 DESTINATION OF THE MONTH
Picture-perfect St Ives

8 PEMBROKESHIRE
Playing the generation game in Wales

16 SUFFOLK
Campervan adventures don't always need to be far from home

22 LINCOLNSHIRE
England's east coast offers a blend of culture, wildlife and fun

28 CAMPSITES FOR HIDDEN GEMS
Our selection of 10 great sites

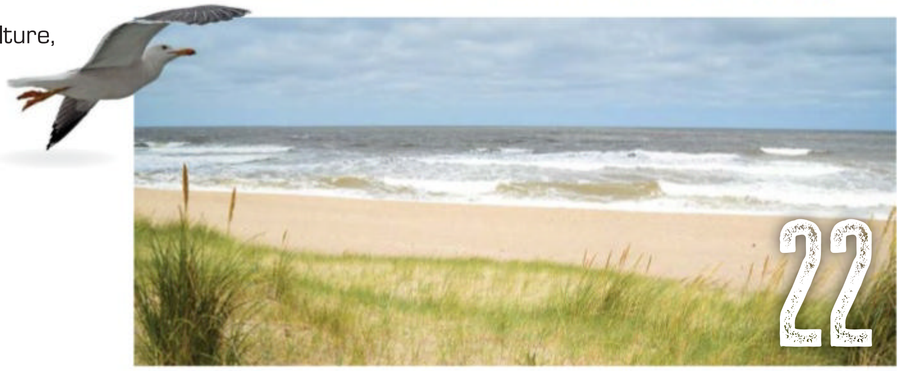
VANLIFE

40 PUB STOPS
Cheap and easy alternatives to staying on a campsite

42 INTO THE VALLEY
Exploring a hidden gem in the Welsh countryside

49 PAWS ON TOUR
Top tips for travelling with dogs

52 PICK A PERFECT PITCH
How to get the campsite that suits you best



IN THIS ISSUE

NEW CAMPERVANS

62 MOBILVETTA ADMIRAL K6.3
A luxury campervan with a bit of bling

68 VOLKSWAGEN CALIFORNIA
The first proper look at the new 'van from VW

74 ADRIA TWIN 60 YEARS
A new model to mark the Slovenian manufacturer's birthday

REGULARS

34 CAMPSITE PROFILE
Pentewan Sands in Cornwall celebrates 80 years of holidays

50 LIFE BEYOND BRICKS
Updates from Tash's life on the road

57 NEWS
What's going on in the world of campervans

76 GET INTO GEAR
The latest accessories for campervan adventures

34
2025
1930
80

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DESTINATION OF THE MONTH

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ST IVES

CORNWALL

This quaint Cornish fishing town is as beloved by art lovers as it is by holidaymakers

The rugged Cornish coastline is just one of the attractions of the idyllic fishing village of St Ives.

Its charm and beauty also make it a favourite haunt of artists who draw inspiration from the sweeping sandy beaches and azure waters.

We love sculptor Barbara Hepworth's house and sculpture garden and the insights they give you into the artist's life.

But there's so much more to enjoy. Outdoor enthusiasts can embark on coastal walks and there's lots for wildlife lovers to see as well. Of course, you can just relax and enjoy the lovely beaches.

Pixabay

ST MICHAEL'S MOUNT

A 20-minute drive from St Ives, St Michael's Mount is a tiny island packed with history, crowned with a medieval castle. Stroll across the granite causeway at low tide or take a boat or ferry to the picturesque harbour and take in the beauty of the stunning gardens.
W stmichaelsmount.co.uk

Afonso Farias/ adobe.stock.com

WALK THE COAST

The six-mile walk along a rocky stretch of the South West Coast Path, from St Ives to the historic village of Zennor, is one of Britain's most popular hikes. The route takes you along stunning coastline, followed by lunch at the Tinners Arms and a bus back.
W southwestcoastpath.org.uk

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PARK 2025

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Just two miles from St Ives town centre, Trevalgan is surrounded by open farmland and set between the gorse, bracken and heather-covered hills of the Cornish coastline. The site is perfect for seaside holidays as well as discovering Cornwall's countryside.
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Taking the grandchildren and their parents away for a week in Pembrokeshire proved pure play for Nick Harding and Lin Oakley

MAIN PHOTO
Wiseman's Bridge

TOP LEFT
Fun and games at Milford Waterfront

LEFT
En route snacking

“There he is. There he is.” Two-year-old Sully simply couldn’t contain his excitement at spotting the Easter Bunny. That’s the real Easter Bunny, of course. The one we told him and his sister – four-year-old Amelie – that we might just encounter on holiday.

Rascal (his real name) was indeed out and about, visiting the attractions at Milford Waterfront. We’d just ordered lunch at burger specialist, Stack’D, (note for next time: neither grandchild particularly likes burgers, nor – even more surprisingly – chips) at Milford Haven’s Waterfront marina complex, when Rascal was seen going into the shop next door... He emerged just a couple of minutes later to come and... gasp... join us. We duly did introductions and took pictures.

I don’t think I’ll ever tire of visits to Pembrokeshire. If you’re after beaches, castles, no motorways, countryside that rolls up to the occasional mountain, plus pleasant surprises like photo opportunities with Easter Bunnies, it’s right up there with the best of them.

This was a pre-Easter week with my partner, Lin, plus Amelie and Sully, two of our grandchildren – with their parents, Rob and Meg, set to join us two days later. We’d had the prospect of what the weather might do in the backs of our minds.

DOING IT
FOR THE (GRAND) KIDS...

Ian Woolcock/stock.adobe.com

MILFORD WATERFRONT
#TyByTheSea
ty-hot

Words Nick Harding **Pictures** Lin Oakley

But we struck sunshine gold with the weather and some of the attractions we visited.

Another massive bonus – for us, at least – was that the school holidays over in Pembrokeshire were still a week away. We had the whole county to ourselves, or so it seemed. Quiet roads, quiet places to visit, easy parking, etc.

And so much was within easy driving distance of our chosen campsite, Mill House Caravan Park at the enticingly named Pleasant Valley in the tiny village of Stepaside. Small enough to be intimate (ie friendly), Mill House has some 20 "static" caravans, with eight touring and four camping pitches. There's more than a touch of exclusivity here and it was certainly a return to a long-term favourite campsite for me, this being something like my seventh visit here.

A three-hour drive from our home in Somerset meant a stop for sandwiches en route after picking up the kids from their respective schools. That's just one of the joys of having a campervan, of course. You're not beholden to motorway services and the like on longer journeys. Instead, we stopped, made sandwiches, shared cold drinks direct from the fridge, etc, before carrying on our journey to Stepaside.

I have to say, though, Milford Waterfront, was new to me. It hosts plenty of events throughout the year, but we were lucky to catch up with the first one of the season – the Easter Market. A small gathering of indoor stalls, we bought chilli sauce from Pleasantly Pickled, handmade soaps from Major Nuts and a handmade pottery vase from Cariad Crafts, while the kids took advantage of a free-to-all selection of pencils and pens, sunglasses, colouring-in pages, puzzles and even a postcard from the organiser.

There was also time to visit the Milford Haven Museum and catch the story of how it developed from a Bronze Age settlement to a high point as a key port to the whaling

➡

ABOVE RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM
Chilling at the waterfront

Millhouse Caravan Park

PIRATE CAFE
Pirate G
& Beach S

USEFUL INFO

- Start your research from home
W visitpembrokeshire.com
- Marina with more
W milfordwaterfront.co.uk
- Dreams and reality
W pembrokecastle.co.uk
- Meet the stick insects, where bug life begins
W thebugfarm.co.uk

- Brush up on your pottery
W thecreativegallery.co.uk
- Say aaargh, eat out at sea
W facebook.com/thepirateamroth

and fishing industries and now, looking ahead to the rest of the twenty-first century and a important role in supporting the world's energy demands.

There's also free parking at Milford Waterfront, and the bays at nearest venue, Mackerel Quay, are particularly wide – it's almost as if they were keeping a brief for those of us with campervans and our side sliding doors. It made for a very active day, so it was no surprise that both Amelie and Sully fell fast asleep on the half-hour journey back to the campsite.

But that was just our first day. Appropriately, if not deliberately, day two saw us leaving the 'van and taking to two wheels (two of us on scooters) for the mile journey out to the nearest beach to the site, Wiseman's Bridge. It's a lovely stroll through woodland on a particularly flat, wide walkway that the kids tackled with ease. It may be a lesser-known short stretch of coast between Amroth and Coppet Hall, then Saundersfoot, but there's enough sand and rocks at Wiseman's Bridge to occupy two beach-happy children. There's also a pub (not used by us this time) and – I remembered – a campsite that also has the only shop in the locality. I was able to break off from the rockpool investigations to get to the shop and buy two lots of buckets and spades – the former concealing a tub of ice cream for each child, which meant I scooped (pun intended) Grandparent of the Day. To be fair, Lin – or Ninnie, as Amelie and Sully prefer to call her – nearly always wins it otherwise.

Our day on the beach was far from complete, as another big surprise was on its way: Meg and Rob seeming to appear from nowhere to join us couldn't have been more dramatic if they'd emerged from the sea itself!

Now, according to Cadw – that's the Welsh Government's historic environment service – Wales has some 427 castles. Pembroke was our chosen one. Even though it's getting on for 950 years old, much of it is still intact. Parking nearby was easy enough, with a short walk (less than quarter of a mile) to the castle. We decided against the (free) guided tour, relying instead on scanning the QR codes that brought up audio tales from individual characters dotted throughout as we wandered

ABOVE RIGHT
TOP TO BOTTOM
Lunching in Amroth

932-year-old Pembroke Castle

Touring the castle

INSET
Tenby North Beach

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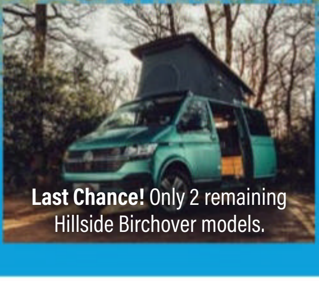

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from Chancery to Dungeon Tower to Great Keep to Wogan Cavern, home to the earliest humans in Britain. There's a large open area in the middle of the outer ward – where a map of Wales on the floor showcases its castles and there are grassed areas where we were able enjoy an impromptu picnic.

Also, we – or rather, Amelie – counted 97 steps down from the Great Keep, where officially there are 100. You can probably imagine the consternation.

Pembroke Castle's best bits? "Where we listened to the people (via the QR codes)," (Amelie). "The dragons on the floor. The one that was asleep," (Sully). The children's hot chocolates (with marshmallows) went down particularly well, too. As did the pastries for the adults purchased from one of the castle's eateries.

It was an even closer journey from Mill House site to our next attraction. Folly Farm is just seven minutes' drive away and even setting aside a day here really doesn't do it justice. There were plenty of farm animals to meet – in ascending order of size: mice, rats, goats, sheep, pigs, horses. Then there's the zoo, with lions, monkeys, meerkats, the only giraffes in Wales, etc. Big news was one of the rhinos was pregnant… but not due to give birth until November.

Plus, there are all kinds of rides – starting with a tractor around the farm – as well as an old-style funfair area (undercover), with everything from traditional fairground rides to slot machines.

ABOVE
Pembroke Castle

INSET
Bug Farm

Sully liked seeing the spider in the toilet (really) and the big pig with its piglets (less than a month old) in the Jolly Barn, the tractor train ride, and an owl. Amelie highlighted the giraffes and the play areas.

Be warned, though. An extensive gift shop devoted mainly to toys and animals is particularly well designed for ensuring doting grandparents are happy to pay for presents for loved ones. Seriously, there's a particularly good deal to look out for if you are on holiday over here. Whatever you paid for your first day, if you come back again within seven days there's no extra charge. Plus, a recent development since I last visited, there's now a full-scale, all-facilities Folly Farm campsite.

From animals great to small… our next trip out was across county to Dr Beynon's Bug Farm, near Saint Davids and well worth the one-hour drive from site. We all learnt so much about bugs and their place in our world and the essential roles they play. For example, did you know that cockroaches can live up to two

WE HAD THE WHOLE COUNTY TO OURSELVES, OR SO IT SEEMED. QUIET ROADS, QUIET PLACES TO VISIT, EASY PARKING

ABOVE CLOCKWISE Hands-on at the Creative Gallery

Folly Farm fun

The beach at Wiseman's Bridge

INSET Tenby North Beach

weeks without a head? And that there are getting on for half a million different species of beetle?

Dr Sarah Beynon is the multi award-winning founder of the Bug Farm, part of a 100-acre of working farm that's now also a major research centre and nature reserve. Among many achievements, she was a major force behind St Davids being named Wales's first bee-friendly city.

No end of facts were thrown at us as we took part in a Meet the Bugs session – getting to hold (or rather, gently stroke) various cockroaches, stick insects, etc – before heading out to the Bug Barn, Bug Museum, Tropical Bug Zoo, Art Gallery, Wildlife Watching Hide and more, the latest of which is the opening of a Nature Recovery Centre and Farming History Exhibition.

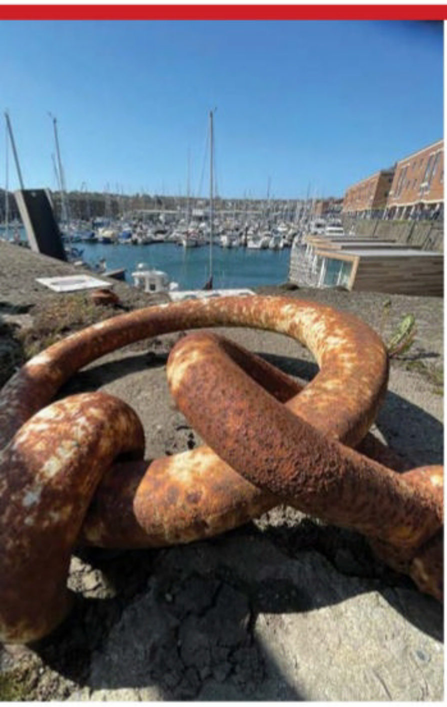
Dr Sarah's husband, Andy Holcroft, is a chef and he has a key role at the Bug Farm, too. Grub Kitchen is the name of the restaurant here and the menu that day included their own VEXo insect and plant bolognaise, bug burgers, cricket cookies and more. Don't worry, there are lots of interesting alternatives if you're feeling a bit squeamish.

Want to put something in your back pocket for a rainy day? How about the chance to paint pottery at The Creative Gallery on the High Street in Haverfordwest. Go downstairs for the studio where you can choose from various items of pottery then add your own paintwork designs – Amelie picked a dolphin, Sully a dinosaur, mum, Meg, concentrated her efforts on a coffee mug, Lin ditto with a small vase. The plate with hands on was a team effort from the grandchildren. Coffee and hot chocolate drinks helped get the creative juices flowing. Also, the arts and crafts shop back up at street level had plenty of great, hand-crafted gift ideas.

After painting, our items were left with owner, Donna, and her team at The Creative Gallery, who then fired them and sent them on to us some ten days later. A brilliant memento of our holidays and what great gifts to give those who, unfortunately, had to stay at home.

It goes without saying we also hit a few other beaches. Sandy Saundersfoot, Tenby's North (there's also a busier South), and Newgale. And that made for a timely reminder. Parking charges excepted, Pembrokeshire's many and varied beaches are free. I wouldn't expect you to visit all the above attractions in one go... that would cost a small fortune. But each has its, er, attractions – most of them suited to days when the weather may not be so kind.

Also, what we spent in terms of



Ian Woolcock/adobe.stock.com

entertainment was offset by cooking our own meals – pasta and tomato sauce, a barbecue, and more, when back on site in the evenings.

But the biggest excitement of the week also involved no actual cost.

Tuesday morning saw a duck and nine ducklings walk right past our campervan while we were having breakfast. Excitement enough for Amelie and Sully. But, although the ducks successfully negotiated crossing the road to get to the river, one got left behind – and came right up to us to tell us of his plight. He took a bit of catching, but eventually we had him and were able to return him to his family... only to find a second duckling who'd become detached from the same family. We had the hang of it now, making a quicker return to the fold.

But, there was more. That evening, on returning from Folly Farm, we discovered a third, lone duckling, stuck in a small drainage area at the back of the campsite reception. This time campsite owner Simon Wood turned superhero – pushing a ladder into the mud before clambering down in his waders to collect the duckling. His wife, Mandy, returned it to its home pond, successfully completing Rescue Number Three. Much to the delight, not just of Amelie and Sully, but all of us.

TOP LEFT
Millford Haven

ABOVE
Saundersfoot

BELOW
Saundersfoot and Amroth

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CATCH A WAVE

A family event, a secret 'city,' and a countryside brimming with legends – a trip to the Waveney Valley proves that a campervan adventure doesn't always need to be far from home

Words & pictures ▌ Sue Phillips

My sister was organising a family reunion and the venue was near the world's smallest city (unofficially and more of that later) and not far from the market town of Beccles in the Waveney Valley. Paul and I planned to join them then decamp to a site in Bungay – another attractive market town – six miles further west on the River Waveney.

Our campsite, Outney Meadow Caravan Park, is on the banks of the river just outside Bungay town centre. We arrived to torrential rain, but a cheerful man in a yellow waterproof cape directed us to our pitch. As the rain eased, we wandered to the riverbank just in time to spot a rainbow reflected in the water. The site's owner told me he had seen otters here.

We had a bit of spare time so headed to the riverside Locks Inn – a community pub in Geldeston – for lunch. This was originally built as a millkeeper's cottage in 1560, and the Locks Inn has been pulling pints since the seventeenth century.

The following day we'd visit the Beccles and District Museum, which has a display board featuring previous landlords. The former landlords include Henry Money whose wife, Anna, bore 18 children; and Fred Morris who, in the 1930s, confiscated a car from a couple who couldn't afford to pay their bill!

The pub is in a remote location halfway between Bungay and Beccles and down a long, narrow, unmade track. However, the *Big Dog Ferry* (a small boat) conveys passengers between the pub and Beccles Lido three miles further down the river.

Turning off the B1062 between Bungay and Beccles onto a small lane towards our family get-together, we noticed a wonky sign for 'Barsham City Only'. An even tinier lane led to a collection of around 25 homes with no church, let alone a cathedral.

MAIN PIC
Fields of bright yellow rapeseed near Geldeston

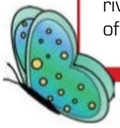
INSET
Our campervan at Outney Meadow Caravan Park

TOP LEFT
Unusual flint latticework on the Holy Trinity Church Barsham with Shipmeadow

TOP RIGHT
Earsham Street, Bungay

✔ TOP TIPS

● Outney Meadow Caravan Park offers canoe hire by the half day. The less energetically inclined can relax and enjoy peaceful views of the River Waveney from a riverside wooden seat at the edge of the campsite



In fact, not only is Barsham City (unofficially) the world's smallest city, it is Suffolk's only city. The origin of the hamlet's unusual name dates back to when workers were sent from Norwich (a cathedral city in neighbouring Norfolk) to labour on two large farms owned by the city council. The 'city' tag remains even though the Norwich connection ended some time ago.

Having travelled from a city ourselves, we were keen to explore the local countryside so we set off on a six-mile circular stroll through Barsham and Shipmeadow with assorted family members and a few dogs. A brown hare, with its distinctive long, black-tipped ears, spotted us at the same moment as we clocked it. Hares can reach speeds of up to 45mph if necessary to escape predators. But, after noticing us, this one loped off casually towards the far end of the field.

The field edges and road verges were filled with swathes of cow

parsley with their umbrella-like clusters of tiny delicate white flowers. Nettles were very much in evidence, both the stinging variety and also pretty red and white dead-nettles.

We also noticed large expanses of an unfamiliar plant with yellowish-green dome-shaped blooms. My brother explained that these were Alexanders (also known as horse parsley), and that this edible plant was once widely used in British cookery, but has since been ousted by celery. He picked a large handful, which later reappeared in a foraged frittata for supper.

OUR 'VAN

Sue Phillips and her husband, Paul, bought their first campervan soon after getting together. The honeymoon was one of their first trips together.

We have a 2020 VW California Ocean T6.1. It's our second ex-demo California. We love the clever detailing; it is a compact and perfect holiday home on wheels

Our footpath took us past Holy Trinity Church in Barsham, where diamond-shaped flint latticework across the end wall of the church caught our eye.

We detoured into the pretty churchyard for a closer look where we got chatting to a former churchwarden who explained that the congregation had decided to convert 'God's acre' (the churchyard) from a closely mown lawn into a haven for wildlife by allowing wildflowers to flourish.

She pointed out bluebells with their dark violet-blue flowers dangling from gently bowed stems, three-cornered garlic with delicate white and pale green flowers, red dead-nettle with pinkish blooms atop unusually ruddy red leaves, greater stitchwort with five notched white petals enclosing pale yellow stamens, and bright yellow buttercups.

ABOVE LEFT
Bungay Castle (also known as Bigod Castle)

ABOVE RIGHT
A rainbow reflected in the river at Outney Meadow Caravan Park

INSET
A tempting selection of cakes in Two Magpies Bakery Beccles

Given the campsite's riverside location, in previous years I would have been tempted to leap into the water for a session of wild swimming. However, English rivers are increasingly polluted. So, I headed for the outdoor pool instead, which turned out to be a good move. Beccles Lido is owned by the local community and has a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.

When I turned up for my early morning swim, the water was a vivid turquoise, and colourful strings of bunting were suspended over the pool. Sunlight filtering through the water created undulating ripple reflections on the floor of the pool beneath me.

Having already established that the local community owned both the riverside Locks Inn and Beccles Lido,

BUNGAY IS PACKED WITH TEMPTING CAFÉS AND PUBS, AS WELL AS A DELICATESSEN, BUTCHER, FISHMONGER AND GREENGROCER

it was clear that this little town has a strong community focus. We later discovered that Beccles has been registered as a Fairtrade Town since 2008. St Michael's Church, a medieval church dating from 1369, sits at the centre of the town and can be seen from many miles away. In fact, we'd noticed the tower on the horizon while exploring the churchyard in Barsham the previous day.

Norfolk, on the other side of the River Waveney, is described as Nelson's county. But Suffolk has connections with Nelson, too. His mother, Catherine Suckling, was born in the rectory next to Holy Trinity Church, and she married Nelson's father in St Michael's Church.

Back in Bungay we took a stroll around the twelfth century Bungay Castle (also known as Bigod Castle). The town's layout developed around the castle that was constructed by Hugh Bigod, the first Earl of Norfolk.

The Bigods were a powerful Norman family who assisted King William with the conquest of England in 1066. As a reward for their support, the king granted them manors and lands throughout East Anglia, including Bungay, with Harold inheriting the family properties in 1120. Many centuries later, in 1987, the seventeenth Duke of Norfolk gave the castle to the townspeople of Bungay who formed a charity, Bungay Castle Trust, to maintain the ruins and promote public interest.

Bungay has had a chequered history. An extensive fire in 1688 destroyed many of the town's buildings and left others badly damaged, leaving a number of townspeople homeless and jobless. But a public appeal was undertaken and, fortunately, donations flooded in from people around the country. As a consequence, the town was virtually rebuilt. Bungay bounced back and, indeed, flourished throughout the Georgian period, attracting wealthy gentry and some infamous characters, including the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin.

BARON BIGOD
St Helena
BURT'S CHEESE
Burt's Blue
St Jude

Due to its popularity, the town

ABOVE LEFT
Boats on the River Waveney at Beccles

ABOVE RIGHT
The interior of the Holy Trinity Church Barsham with Shipmeadow

INSET
A selection of goodies from the Milk Shed

earned itself the nickname 'Little London'.

These days it's clearly a destination for food lovers. Earsham Street is packed with tempting cafés and pubs, as well as a delicatessen, butcher, fishmonger and greengrocer. Not to mention a number of lifestyle outlets and gift shops.

We stopped off for coffee and a delicious blueberry custard pastry at the tiny Front Room bakery (takeaway only), sharing a bench outside with a man who informed us he'd been their very first customer back in 2019. A little further down the road, we popped into the eponymous Earsham Street Deli for charcuterie and chocolate.

Then onto St Peter's Brewery, a craft brewery located in the outbuildings of the moated St Peter's Hall near Bungay. We'd booked onto a Talk & Taste tour to learn more about traditional brewing methods.

Our guide explained that the brewery's founder, John Murphy, was a former marketing professional who introduced the concept of branding to the marketing industry (one of his early successes was the Hobnob biscuit brand). He saw an opportunity in the poor quality and marketing of beer at that time, and established St Peter's Brewery in 1996.

The bottle label features a key (representing St Peter holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven) and a raven. The raven is a symbol associated with Vikings and one explanation is that the moat around St Peter's Hall was designed to deter Viking marauders.

We were also keen to visit Fen Farm Dairy, a third-generation family farm that aims to establish new sustainability standards in dairy farming.

The family constructed a milk shed next to the cowsheds, the lovechild of a serve-yourself convenience store and an honesty box (in the form of an unsupervised credit card machine). We loaded up with a selection of local cheeses, including Baron Bigod, a traditional Brie-de-Meaux style cheese, produced on the farm and made using milk from their herd of free-range Montbéliarde cows.

We both assumed I was now done with shopping. However, just a few miles out of Bungay we pulled into a garden centre for a quick look around (a weakness of mine).

Unexpectedly, we departed with a fishpond, which we could just fit it in the 'van if we rearranged our luggage, but it was far too heavy for us to lift.

Fortunately, a couple of muscular motorcyclists in the garden centre's café offered to get it into our 'van. We'd worry about how to get it out again later.

And once we'd set up the fishpond in our garden, it would provide a permanent reminder of our riverside weekend in Beccles and Bungay.

RIGHT
A patch of red dead-nettles

BELOW CLOCKWISE
St Michael's Church in Beccles

Earsham Street, Bungay

Fen Farm Dairy's Milk Shed

The moated St. Peter's Hall in St Peter South Elmham

the swan house
Restaurant and Inn

The Castle Inn
2 minute walk

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Words & pictures ▮ Brian Symonds

Lincolnshire's coast offers an unexpected blend of culture, wildlife and fun for two and four-legged campervanners

Artwork and amusements, beaches, birds and a bomber, through to a pier, plaques, a poet and poignant letters: this is a dog-friendly week in Lincolnshire based one mile inland from the coast at Sutton on Sea.

From the Humber estuary in the north to the Wash south of Skegness, the coast is generally a broad beach.

Near towns – Mablethorpe, Sutton on Sea, Chapel St Leonards and Skegness – dog walking is restricted, but on our campsite there seemed to be even more dogs than normal because owners know how many wonderful miles of sand are available for dogs to run free.

Breeding seals at Donna Nook, north of Saltfleet and at Gibraltar Point at the southern end, where there are also ground-nesting birds, create other restrictions, but they barely impinge on canine exercise.

MAIN PIC
The tranquil golden sands of Lincolnshire's coast

ABOVE
Louth market

LEFT
The waiting game, Sutton on Sea

FAR RIGHT
High and dry, Wainfleet Creek, Gibraltar Point

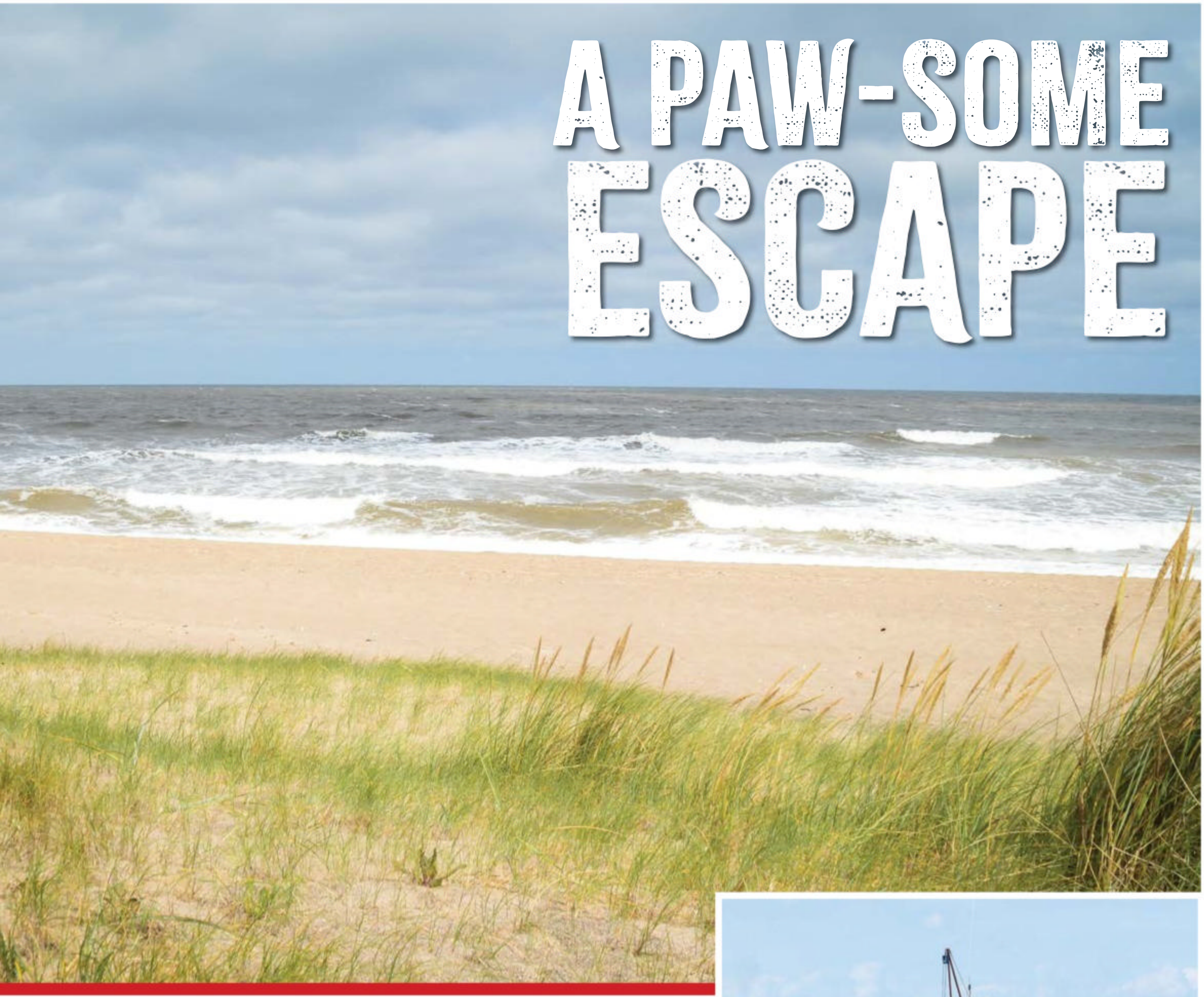
Gibraltar Point is a National Nature Reserve. It consists of more than 1,000 acres of sandy and muddy shores, sand dunes, salt marshes, grassland and lagoons. As the tide drained from the Wash, water also ran out of Wainfleet Creek, leaving boats high and dry on mud.

From a viewpoint we could see Norfolk 14 miles away, the view across the Wash broken by sandbanks exposed by the receding tide and becoming a place for seals to bask in the sunshine. In a hide by a shallow pond, we watched a black-headed gull bringing fresh nest material to its mate clearly already sitting on eggs.

Through our binoculars we also identified shelducks, avocets, coots, egrets and more. Here, and at Saltfleet, sea lavender was creating a purple haze across the salt marsh.

The Gibraltar Point Reserve is three miles south of Skegness, where we were headed next. We strolled to the lovely promenade where, as if inviting us forward, lay the best golden, firm sand we saw all week, but, accompanied by Ben the sprocker, we kept off the beach

A PAW-SOME ESCAPE



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and made our way to the short pier and sat in sunshine admiring the fantastic views.

To our right behind a wall, we glimpsed rides of the funfair and on the promenade the essential seaside sunshine vehicle, a Mr Whippy van. To our left, out in the North Sea, lay the turbines of a giant wind farm turning only gently in a light breeze.

Walking into the funfair, a pirate boat swung to and fro, while a big wheel turned slowly with its seats in the form of the gondolas hung below historic balloons. Other folk rode roller coasters and children sat astride model elephants on the Dumbo carousel. Smaller children could pretend to do what many adults would like to try in real life: drive a fire engine! It was a scene of noise, colour and fun.

The stretch north from Skegness through Ingoldmells is dominated by holiday parks and corrugated static caravans before reaching the quieter village community of Chapel St Leonards. Here, there is a small amusement arcade, but most of the shops and the pub are like those found in many villages.

All except for one selling the holiday essentials of buckets and spades, coloured balls and windbreaks, and a second selling bags and the like.

We enjoyed coffee at a café on the promenade next to a Punch and Judy cabinet, silent on a quiet midweek morning.

From here it is a 15-minute walk along the promenade to the North Sea Observatory at Chapel Point, though we took Ben across the dunes for a run on the beach and a slower walk on soft sand.

There are three blocks of beach huts along the promenade, finishing by the observatory with a hut painted bright blue and yellow and named Oozutizit. The observatory is a smart coastal building but it appeared to us to be little more than an extravagant café.

It does house a coastguard operation, but just what the officers could achieve in a day peering through their binoculars was not clear.

Later in the week, I smiled at names on huts at Sutton on Sea: 'Seas the Day' and hut number 40 where the owners had added 'Winks'. Sea Breeze and Life's a Beach are perhaps to be expected, but on the whole the quality of the beach hut stock was somewhat on the dilapidated side.

Our first trip inland was on Tuesday, market day in the small town of Alford. The market, too, was small but had the usual stallholders selling cakes, plants and vegetables. We bought Boston new potatoes for our dinner; around the county we would see more signs of farm shops announcing the availability of Bostons.

A novelty at this market was to see buyers bidding in a rather informal auction of tools and other bric-a-brac.

If I retain one memory from Alford it might be the fish and chip shop in Church Street. In a delightful play on words the proprietors were operating the Jolly Friar.

Moving inland and northwest from Sutton on Sea, the largest nearby town is Louth, capital of the Lincolnshire Wolds. We were there on a Wednesday, one of its three market days.

In 2012 BBC's *Countryfile* declared Louth to be Britain's favourite market town. This was a larger and busier market with fabric and clothing stalls adding to the offering.

We explored on a Treasure Trail, which produced several interesting glimpses into its history, going by the many plaques around the town.

Firstly, in 1536, the time of Henry VIII and religious changes including the dissolution of the monasteries, the vicar of St James led the Lincolnshire Rising. Subsequently, the vicar was arrested; he was later hanged at Tyburn in London.

Of more favourable repute, the poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, was taught at the local grammar school, where he wrote a line that is still true today, "An old wall covered with wild weeds opposite the school windows".

Other items on walls appeared to be plaques – blue background, white lettering – but also appeared

TOP LEFT
Gunby Hall

TOP RIGHT
Black-headed gull with nesting material, Gibraltar Point

INSET
A rose at Gunby Hall walled garden

BELOW
Catnip in the border at Gunby Hall walled garden

to be slightly gibberish. Luckily, we were able to ask a local when we stood by the first. She explained there are several around the town and they are pieces of artwork.

Here are the texts from two: "... Lost in Louth? Hope you discovered a place you were not looking for..." and "... go through straight. Then slight left, straight, and then opposite side. Just a little bit of right-hand..." I will call them intriguing gibberish.

Another plaque, easily missed on the wall beside a small pizza café, marks a point Louth shares with London: the Greenwich meridian line passes through.

Louth is in the rolling countryside of the wolds. Heading inland and southwest from our campsite on the other hand, the land of Lincolnshire is predominantly flat.

It remains a key area for RAF bases, but there were even more during World War II.

We visited the National Trust property at Gunby Hall, a substantial house where Thomas Massingberd began construction in 1700. It is surrounded by 1,500 acres of farmland.

In 1943, Archie and Diana Montgomery-Massingberd resided here. They saw strange men on their land, challenged them and were told the Air Ministry was looking into an extension of the runway at RAF Spilsby to allow flights by bombers and Gunby Hall would have to be demolished.

Archie, himself a Field Marshal, petitioned the king and others and won the day; the runway was realigned and the estate lost only a few trees.

Diana, the Massingberd heiress in the family, was nevertheless concerned for the future of Gunby Hall and organised its transfer to the National Trust. Under the arrangement she was allowed to live in the hall until her death.

The National Trust continues to maintain a splendid walled garden that lies behind the house.

Apart from wonderful colourful borders, they were growing carrots, celery, chard and potatoes, and trees in their orchard suggested there will be a good apple crop in due course.

There was a second airfield a little further beyond Spilsby. RAF East Kirkby was a base for Lancaster bombers from 1943 to 1945 and is now maintained privately as the Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre, a museum paying homage to Bomber Command, the Lancaster and squadrons 57 and 630 which flew the bomber.

Lancaster registration NX611, *Just Jane*, is the museum's prime exhibit. During summer months it is taxied from its hangar and available for visitors to pay a premium to climb into the cockpit

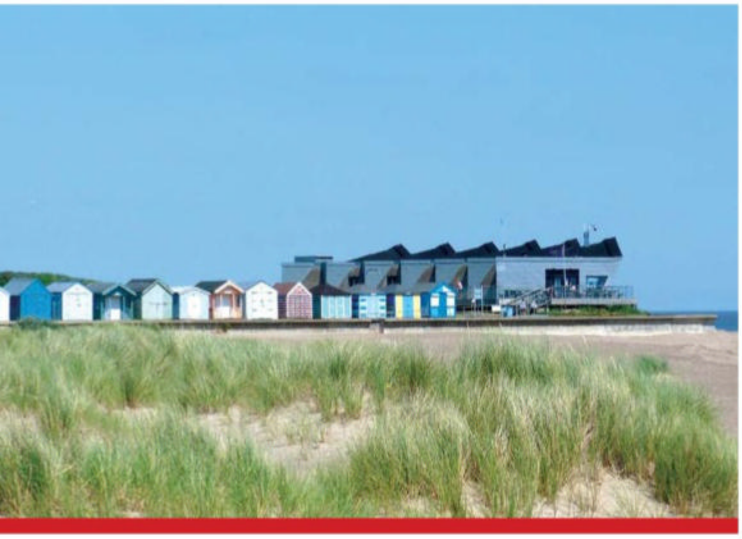
ESCAPE GAME
Lincs FM

WE STROLLED TO THE LOVELY PROMENADE WHERE, AS IF INVITING US FORWARD, LAY THE BEST GOLDEN, FIRM SAND

ABOVE
Skegness Pier

BELOW LEFT
North Sea Observatory and beach huts, Chapel Point

BELOW RIGHT
Punch and Judy, Chapel St Leonards



USEFUL INFO

- The destination section at **visitlincolnshire.com** includes pieces on the wolds and the coast as well as pages on Alford, Louth, Mablethorpe, Skegness and Sutton on Sea
- The source for information about the Lancaster Bomber museum is **lincsaviation.co.uk**
- Information including opening times and admission prices for Gunby Hall is at **nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/nottinghamshire-lincolnshire/gunby-estate-hall-and-gardens**

for special souvenir photographs, the fees going towards the cost of bringing the aircraft back into flying condition.

There are some 20 buildings around the fringe of the airfield ranging from the control room to the Nissen huts that were the billets and briefing rooms for the aircrew. In an exhibition about the Home Guard there are also wartime leaflets explaining how to make potato soup and how best to grow carrots.

There are posters warning that careless talk costs lives and walls have ears. In the hangar you can read the log books from the pilots showing which missions they flew on what date and at what time.

Losses from RAF East Kirkby were substantial – more than 100 aircraft, more than 800 crew. In a billet there are two poignant letters. One is from a pilot to his mother and father hoping they will never have to read it and asking that they contact his girlfriend if it should come to pass, and the second is from his friend to the parents sadly enclosing the first and eulogising his lost comrade.

We walked on the promenades and beaches at Sutton on Sea and Mablethorpe. The former is fairly quiet. We spoke to a gentleman fishing from the beach, getting set up atop a slope on the beach for the incoming tide, which would create water of adequate depth to bring fish within range. Asked what size of fish he hopes to catch, he held his arms wide in typical fisherman fashion.

Mablethorpe is more brash, home to a crazy golf course built on the theme of a pirate and with downmarket amusement arcades the moment you leave the promenade and step onto the main shopping street.

In its window display a shop was selling T-shirts with generally coarse messages, but I will repeat a gentle one. Together with a picture of a pair of step ladders, the slightly surreal narrative read “This is my step ladder. I never knew my real ladder.”

ABOVE
Lancaster bomber *Just Jane*

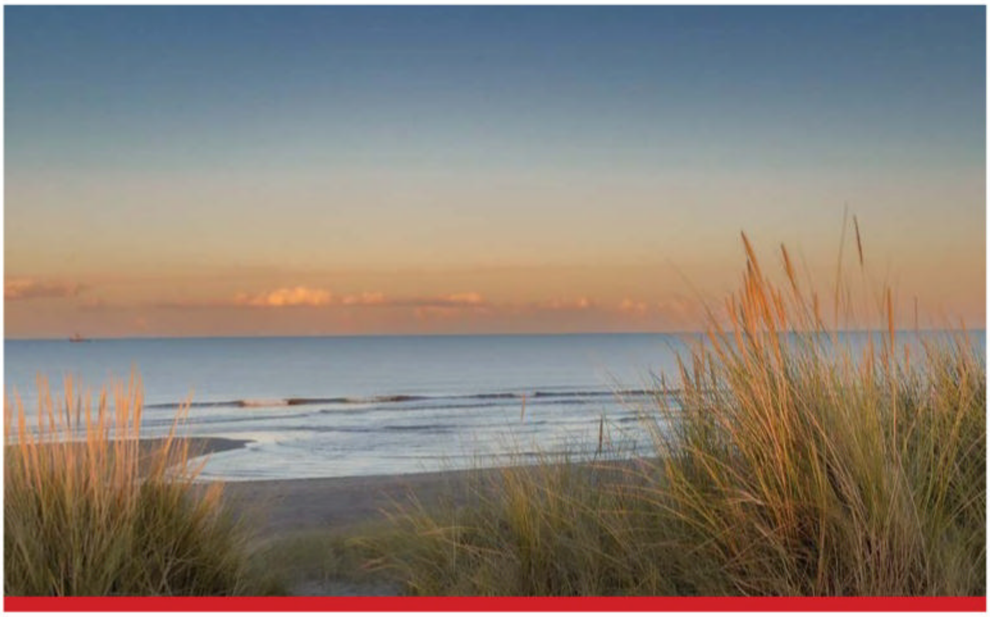
BELOW
Lincolnshire beach sunset

Compared with many parts of the country this coast is a little strange in that there are no small harbours with fishing boats, the more industrial ones of course being in the Humber at Grimsby.

There is a narrow inlet at Saltfleet Haven and then nothing until Wainfleet Creek at the southern end, which is around 30 miles away.

There is simply a grand stretch of sand, flat and stretching out a long way at low tide at Saltfleet, still broad but sloping more steadily at the other points all the way south to Skegness.

I had never been to Lincolnshire before. I am delighted I had included it on our wish list, for we had an enjoyable week of history, beaches, wildlife and fun.



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Kudos 20" Wheel Lightweight Alloy Folding bicycle
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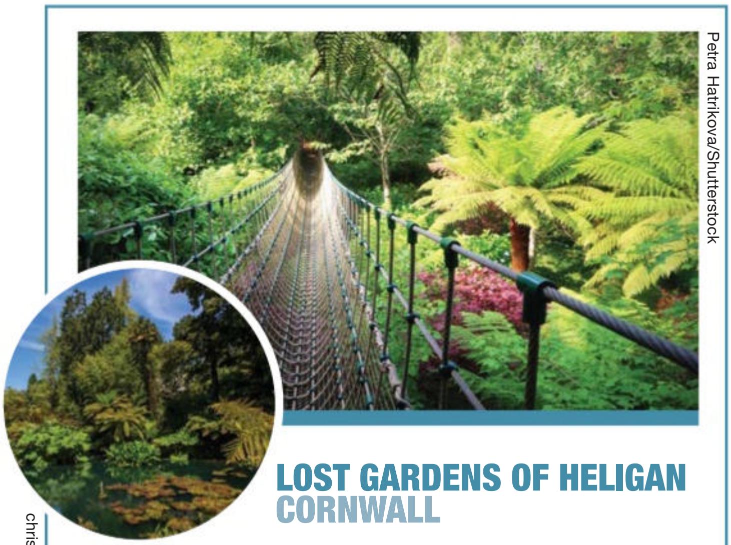
• Since Covid-19 the best means of contact is by email - sales@rallydesign.co.uk

A GETAWAY WITH ADDED SPARKLE

We've uncovered some of Britain's hidden gems and less well-known attractions, which make for an extra-special break

Words Claire Tupholme



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LOST GARDENS OF HELIGAN

CORNWALL

While technically not a hidden gem as the gardens are quite well known, this attraction is included in our feature because they were hidden through time since the First World War, until they were discovered and restored in 1990. Today they are 200 acres of paradise for those who love to explore and those who love plants. Another reason to include these gardens is for the proximity of a campsite to stay on and access them with ease. There's one just across the lane from the gardens and there's also a discounted Lost Gardens entry offer to anyone staying on the campsite.

The campsite at Heligan is nestled in the countryside with a selection of pitches and facilities, including toilets and showers, private bathrooms, accessible facilities, a launderette, a dog shower and a shop. The coast path and all the leisure and dining facilities of sister park, Pentewan Sands, are only one and a half miles away.

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St Ewe, St Austell,
Cornwall
PL26 6EL
T 01726 842714
W heligancampsite.com
OPEN 31 January – 16 November

MOTHER SHIPTON'S CAVE

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Set within historic woodland alongside the River Nidd, this is one of England's oldest attractions. This place of mystery tells the story of Mother Shipton, a prophetess (who foretold of the Great Fire of London, among other things), the Petrifying Well, and the waters that turn objects to stone. There is also a museum of objects that have been turned to stone, often donated by celebrities, one of which is a shoe left by Queen Mary after she visited in 1923. After exploring the cave and parkland, you can take a walk around the picturesque market town of Knaresborough where the cave is located.

Harrogate Caravan Park is three miles from the centre of Knaresborough and you can easily access the town and nearby Harrogate by bus and train if you'd prefer not to drive. The site has hardstanding pitches with electric hook-up, heated washrooms and a launderette. On the doorstep, there's the award-winning farm shop and café, Fodder.

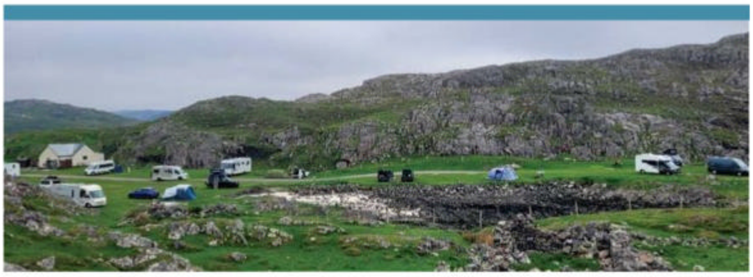
Daniel Heighton/Shutterstock

GetFocusArt/stock.adobe.com

STAY AT

HARROGATE CARAVAN PARK

Great Yorkshire Showground,
Harrogate, North Yorkshire HG2 8NZ
T 01423 546145
W harrogatecaravanpark.co.uk
OPEN 1 March – 31 October



ACHMELVICH BEACH
SUTHERLAND

Stunning is an overused word, but there's simply no other way to describe this gorgeous, white sandy bay in the Highlands. On a warm, sunny day, you really could imagine that you've taken a wrong turning and somehow ended up in the Caribbean, rather than a remote corner of Scotland's northwest coast. This is truly one of Scotland's best-kept secrets.

Achmelvich itself is little more than a smattering of homes, three miles along narrow, winding roads from the nearest town, Lochinver. But it is an idyllic spot and well worth the lengthy drive to get here.

Just a stone's throw from the beach, Shore Caravan Site is an informal affair with unallocated grass pitches and 20 electric hook-ups available. There are toilets, showers, a shop and fish and chip takeaway on site.

STAY AT
SHORE CARAVAN SITE

106 Achmelvich, Lochinver, Sutherland IV27 4JB
T 01571 844393
W shorecaravansite.co.uk
OPEN 1 April – 30 September

THE NEEDLES CHAIRLIFT
ISLE OF WIGHT

On the most westerly coast of the Isle of Wight is Alum Bay, a pebble beach with multicoloured cliffs, turquoise waters and impressive views. What makes this location extra-special is the unique way of reaching the beach. The chairlift takes you from the visitor centre at the top of the cliffs down to the beach below, with incredible views of the three distinctive chalk stacks known as the Needles, throughout the descent. At the beach you can enjoy a paddle in the sea or take a pleasure cruise out for a closer look at the Needles and the lighthouse. Back up on the top of the cliffs is the Needles Old Battery and New Battery, the former once being a military fort and the latter a secret space rocket testing site between the 1950s and 1970s.

Just a 10-minute drive from Alum Bay is Heathfield Farm, on the outskirts of Freshwater village. On the campsite there are grass pitches, some with electric hook-up and six with stunning sea views. There is a wildflower meadow, where dogs can also be exercised, and facilities include toilets, showers, dishwashing and a laundry area.

STAY AT
HEATHFIELD FARM CAMPING PARK

Heathfield Road, Freshwater, Isle of Wight
PO40 9SH
T 01983 407822
W heathfieldcamping.co.uk
OPEN 10 May – 13 September

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YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK

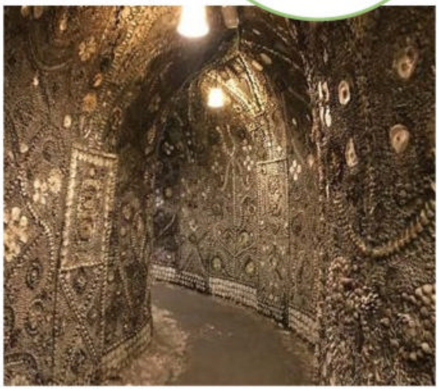
An art gallery with a difference, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park is an outdoor exhibition space situated in 500 acres of the Bretton Hall Estate in West Yorkshire, the largest of its kind in Europe. Here you can see works in the open air from some of the world's leading artists, including Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Andy Goldsworthy, and yet it is still surprisingly little-known. You can easily spend a day here wandering around, gazing at the sculptures and simply enjoying the beautiful setting. There's woodland, a lake and café all on site, too.

Just a short five-mile drive from the sculpture park is Broadlands Farm. This is an adults-only campsite with hardstanding pitches with electric hook-up. There is a dog walking area, toilets and showers, a laundry room, and public transport into Wakefield city centre.

STAY AT
BROADLANDS FARM TOURING CARAVAN SITE

101 Durkar Low Lane, Durkar, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF4 3BJ
T 01924 255500
W durkar.com
OPEN 1 March – 31 December

SHELL GROTTO KENT

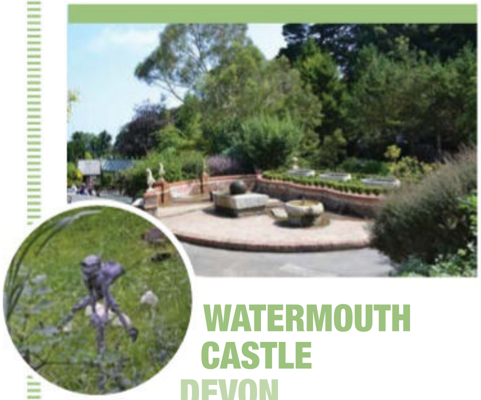


This unique subterranean attraction remains a mystery, more than 140 years after it was discovered by chance below a cottage in the Kent seaside town of Margate. The Shell Grotto's walls are entirely covered with mosaics and patterns made up of 4.6 million sea shells. Despite numerous theories, no one knows why or how the underground grotto was created or who built it. Some believe it's an ancient religious temple, while others reckon it may have been the meeting place for a secret sect; it may just have been an eccentric folly.

Four miles from Margate, Quex Holiday Park is set just over a mile from Quex Park, an activity centre and craft village with garden centre and places to eat. The campsite has grass and hardstanding electric pitches, along with toilets, showers, a laundry room, a small shop and café.

STAY AT
QUEX HOLIDAY PARK

Park Road, Birchington, Kent
CT7 0BL
T 01843 841273
W keatfarm.co.uk
OPEN 12 February – 30 November



WATERMOUTH CASTLE DEVON

Eclectic doesn't quite do Watermouth Castle justice. One of the highlights is the animatronic of a life-size robot band playing oompah versions of classic pop tunes. The house is packed full of similarly quirky treasures, nostalgic displays and curios. Outside, the main park includes rides, play areas, mind-bending old funfair attractions, a maze and beautiful landscaped gardens. And then there's Gnome Land – the secret world of little people which has to be seen to be believed.

Our favourite was the underground show of 1,000 jets of water and coloured lights synchronised to music played on a 1920s Mortier Organ. If it all sounds a bit bizarre, it is... but brilliantly so.

Hele Valley is only two miles from this unusual attraction, situated in between woodland and a 10-minute walk from the beach. There are electric, hardstanding pitches, along with the usual facilities.

STAY AT
HELE VALLEY HOLIDAY PARK

Hele Bay, Ilfracombe, Devon EX34 9RD
T 01271 862460
W helevalley.co.uk
OPEN 1 April – 31 October

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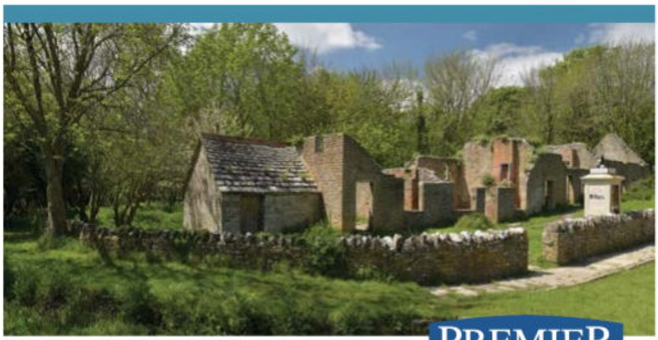
TYNEHAM GHOST VILLAGE
DORSET

Time has stood still in the south Dorset village of Tyneham since it was permanently evacuated 80 years ago. As it is uninhabited, it's not well signposted and doesn't have a postcode that can be entered into sat-navs. Mobile phone reception is poor, too, so there is a distinct feeling that this is a 'lost' village.

Tyneham residents were given a month to move out after being told the area was needed for military training during World War II. Even after the war ended, the villagers weren't allowed to return and it has lain empty ever since. Tyneham remains part of the British Army's training school 80 years on with public access severely restricted. But on most weekends and public holidays, the village and surrounding area is open and you can visit.

Ulwell Holiday Park is 10 miles from Tyneham, with grass and hardstanding pitches, an indoor pool, shop, bar and restaurant.


DavidYoung/Shutterstock

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ULWELL HOLIDAY PARK
Ulwell Road, Swanage, Dorset BH19 3DG
T 01929 422823
W ullwellholidaypark.co.uk
OPEN 1 March – 7 January

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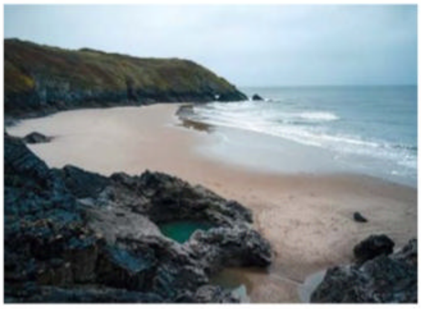
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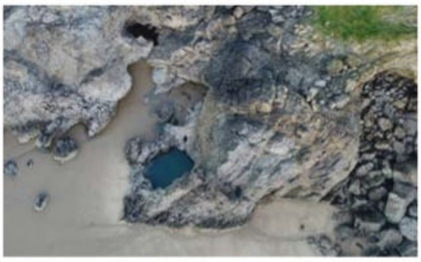
Leighton Collins/Shutterstock

BLUE POOL BAY
SWANSEA

The Blue Pool is on the northwest tip of Wales' Gower Peninsula. At 15 feet (4.6m) wide and eight feet (2.4m) deep, it is a large, circular rockpool surrounded by cliffs that is considered one of the best wild swimming spots in the UK.

Because it is so remote and access is so difficult, this is a true hidden gem, but it is well worth seeking out on a visit to the Gower, especially if you enjoy natural swimming or want to appreciate the natural beauty of the area. Along the coast from the pool is a series of sea arches called the Three Chimneys, as well as some small caves.

Parking to walk and access the Blue Pool is available at Broughton Farm Caravan Park, but the closest touring park is at Kennexstone Farm, two and a half miles away. There are grass and hardstanding pitches with electric, plus a shop, café and fast food takeaway.

STAY AT
KENNEXSTONE CAMPING & TOURING PARK
Kennexstone Farm, Llangennith, Gower, Swansea SA3 1HS
T 01792 386790 **W** gowercamping.co.uk **OPEN** 1 April – 30 September

THE CAIRNGORM REINDEER HERD,
INVERNESS-SHIRE

The Cairngorm Reindeer Centre at Glenmore, just outside Aviemore, is the base for Britain's only free-roaming reindeer herd and here you can get up close to these animals in their natural environment. It really is a wonderful experience. A guided hill trip is a great way to get to know the reindeer, walk among them, and find out a bit about their history. Right next door to the reindeer herd location is Glenmore Forest Park, a protected landscape of lakes, heather-clad hills and pine forest with various walking routes.

Pretty much over the road from the reindeer centre is Glenmore Campsite with access to Loch Morlich and a small sandy beach at the shoreline. Pitches are grass or hardstanding with electric and there are toilets, showers and a laundry. Water sports are available on Loch Morlich and a bar and restaurant are within walking distance.

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W glenmore-campsite.com
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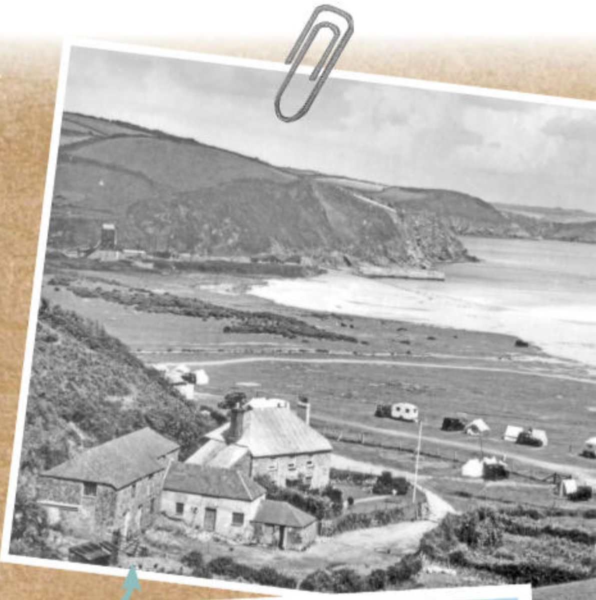
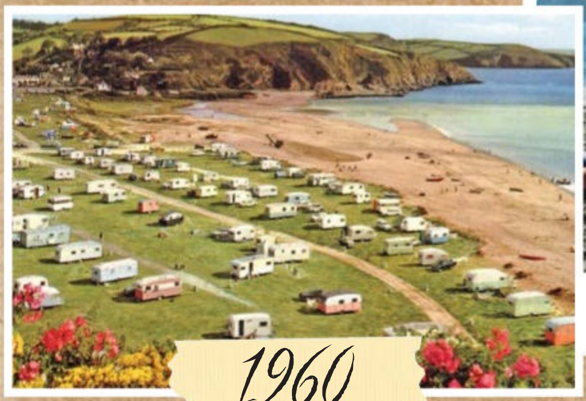
80 YEARS OF FUN

Pentewan Sands Holiday Park celebrates 80 years of family camping holidays on the Cornish coast this year. Here's a look back at the history of this popular seaside holiday park


1930

1970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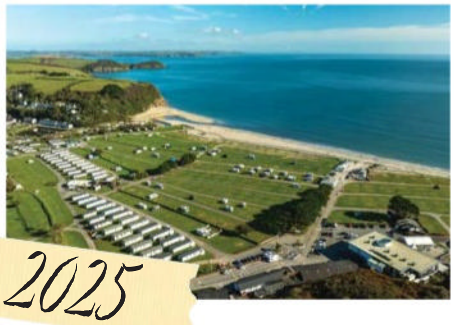
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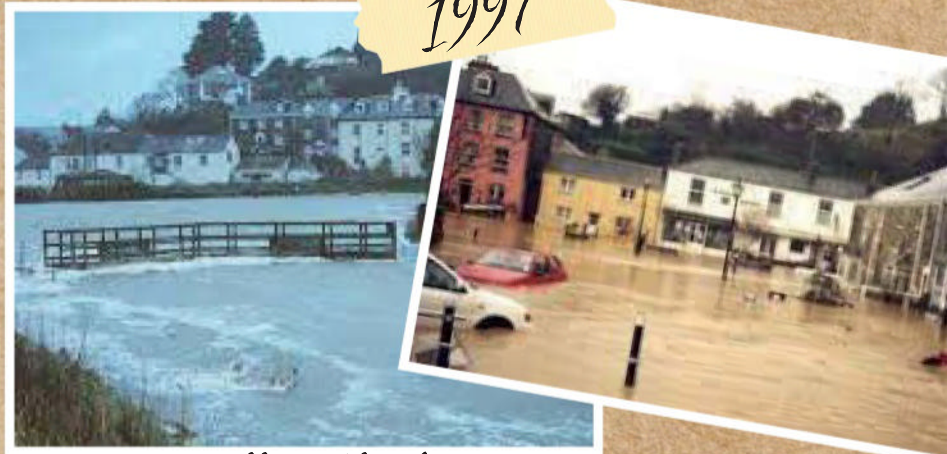

1997

Pentewen village flood in 1997

Location, location, location! Since 1945, campers have flocked to Pentewan Sands to enjoy the Cornish coast.

The five-star site is right on the beach – with some pitches just a few steps from the sand. These get snapped up quickly, though, so make sure you book early!

These days, Pentewan has everything you could need on a campsite – two indoor pools, a whirlpool bath, tennis courts, water sports, a supermarket and plenty of places to eat. To mark its 80th anniversary, a brand-new Asian fusion restaurant – Stingi's – opened and there are competitions and giveaways all year for guests, from family passes at local attractions to free holidays.

Long before the days of the five-star holiday park, the area on which Pentewan Sands sits was once farmland, with a harbour used for transporting goods out of Cornwall.

The Pentewan Valley Trail (now popular with cyclists and hikers) runs along the bed of an old narrow-gauge railway that was once used for transporting clay and tin to the docks, where it was transported overseas. At its peak, Pentewan shipped a third of Cornwall's china clay from local quarries in St Austell, a thriving industry that the area is famous for.

In the 1920s and 30s, the Winnick, as it was originally called, was a working farm with cattle on it in the winter months and campers in the summer months.

During the Second World War, the land was used to house American troops and their families when they came to visit. The surrounding areas were used for training and socialising during family time, which led to the idea of a holiday park.

When the war came to an end and the troops departed, several of the wooden cabins used to house them were converted into holiday lodges in an area now known as The Willows.

In 1945, Pentewan Sands Holiday Park opened. The park was the brainchild of Air Marshal Sir John Tremayne, his WW1 Air Force Observer, Sir Victor Sassoon, and Submariner Cecil Malleson VC. In the aftermath of two world wars, they felt compelled to fill the shores of the south coast of Cornwall with laughter and joy again.

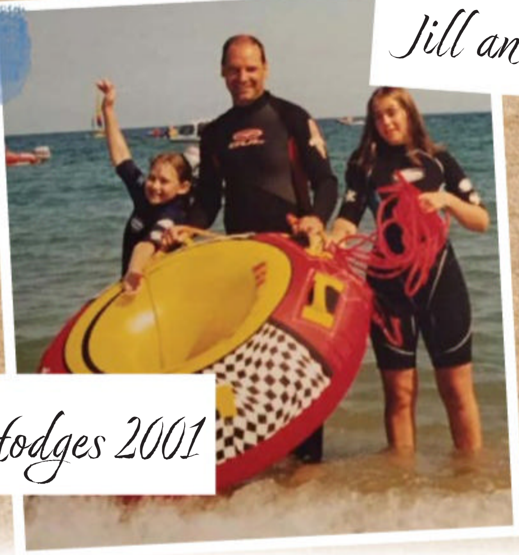
The park continued to grow and develop between the 60s and 80s, with the addition of touring pitches, more holiday lodges, an outdoor swimming pool and entertainment.

In 1990, the first static caravan was introduced to Pentewan Sands. Prior to that, there were 39 chalets. The park now has 132 holiday homes and 417 touring pitches.

1950

1980

Jill and Marc 1983



Jane Hodges 2001

Louise Hinton
as a baby in
1981 and
returning in
2020 with her
mum

It's been eight decades since we welcomed our very first guests to our park – even though in some ways it still feels like yesterday! Over the years, we've welcomed generations of families and loved ones to our park – as guests and as members of our team – and we're honoured to have been a part of their treasured experiences and memories."

Damien French – married on the beach June 2019

2019

A terrible storm in 1991 destroyed the beach, resulting in a restoration project with storm defences to prevent further sand movement. The continuation of this project protects both the park and the local village of Pentewan.

In 2006, the beach was used for marine training, which continued for a few years and still occurs now and again! A year later, The Lookout holiday home was built on top of an old lime kiln, providing elevated views across the park and the bay of Mevagissey.

In 2015, the popular burger chain, Hub Box, opened a branch on the beach at Pentewan Sands, and meanwhile the facilities were developed to provide two indoor swimming pools with flumes, new restaurants and takeaways, an amusement arcade and children's entertainment in peak holidays. In 2017, the park entered the Cornwall Tourism Awards and won three awards.

2010

2020s touring and camping

2024

Stingi's 2025

Information

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Pentewan, St Austell,
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W pentewan.co.uk

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CORNWALL

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A NIGHT AT THE PUB

Pete Stuart/Shutterstock

A popular pub stopover – the Tan Hill Inn at Swaledale in North Yorkshire

Looking for somewhere cheap and easy as an alternative to a campsite? Pub stopovers add another option to the mix

Words & pictures | Ade Pitman

Owning a campervan brings both freedom and spontaneity into our lives; we can just get up and go whenever and wherever we feel the need. Arriving at a campsite is both exciting and relaxing, but the back-to-nature thrill of going off-grid brings with it a simplistic happiness far from the madding crowd.

Staying overnight at a pub brings with it yet another dimension to our eclectic mix of adventure possibilities, particularly out of season when our camping options are limited, or during peak times when all the campsites in the area you want to visit are full. This is particularly the case when events are taking place, although there are usually more pubs in an area than campsites so a simple telephone call could help you to find a pub stopover for the night.

♥ 5 FAVE STOPS

My five top pub stops. It's always best to call in advance

- Kings Arms, Newent
- The Summerhouse, Weston-super-Mare
- The Trawler, Brixham
- The Toby Carvery Lympstone, near Exmouth
- The Black Swan, Jackfield, near Ironbridge

Finding one online is also remarkably simple, as there are many social media accounts or dedicated subscription websites to help you.

HOW IT WORKS

Not only can a pub stopover provide even more flexibility to your adventuring, but it could also help stretch your 'adventure budget' too. In the difficult trading environment which many pubs now find themselves, offering stopovers enables them to attract new customers from outside of their locality.

There are several ways that a pub stopover works. Some pubs (and even hotels) have a limited number of dedicated spaces for stopovers, so it's always worth phoning them to check their terms and availability.

Starting with the most conventional, some pubs have small campsites on their property that can be booked in the usual way. Often, though, the toilets are only available during pub opening hours, and the pitch prices can vary considerably.

Then there is the 'charitable donation' option, where you make a suggested donation to the charity of the landlord's choice for your pitch. This is really a win-win option because, not only do you have a cheap stopover but the charity raises much-needed cash as well.

And, finally, there are the stopovers where you are expected to eat and drink at the venue. Sometimes you pay a fee initially, but this is usually refunded when you place your food order.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR

Once you have decided to try out overnighting at a pub (or hotel) car

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF PUB STOPOVERS

DO phone in advance to check
DO NOT put out your camping gear. It's a pub car park, not a campsite
DO be courteous to the locals
DO take any rubbish home, so as not to spoil the stopover for others

Ironbridge in Shropshire

park, there are a couple of essential things to look for.

Our priority is always the menu, because pubs vary considerably, as do their menus. My partner is a vegetarian, so a vegetarian option is essential. We have noticed that pubs that serve traditional 'pub food' tend to be more affordable to anyone on a tight budget than gastropubs. Each to their own, as they say.

For ease of comparison, I always look for the pub-standard fish and chips to provide me with a benchmark as to the prices. It may be crude but it allows me to compare like for like.

As with camping off-grid, the pub's car park is also essential. A large, flat, smooth surface is ideal, although they are often either sloping or gravel, or both. I use Google Map's satellite facility to check out the car park and its ease of access, because Skylark (our campervan) is rather long.

The car park also needs to feel safe, and ideally not be too noisy after closing time. Remember that it's a pub stopover and not a campsite, so perfect might not be possible.

THE DOWNSIDE

Often when I have asked a pub if we can stop over, they stress that security cannot be guaranteed. This is normal, and is the reason that many campsites lock their gates at a certain time. Often just going into the pub for a soft drink will give you a feel for what the area is like. If it feels wrong to you, it is. You will need to assess your safety in exactly the same way that you would for any off-grid adventure.

And then there are the toilet facilities. Unless you have a toilet in your campervan, pub stopovers probably aren't for you, because access to the toilets usually ends when the pub closes. Pubs that offer a breakfast menu are a good option for the 'early morning essentials'.

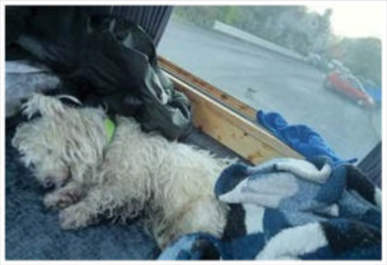
A WARM FIRE AND NEW FRIENDS

We tend to experience as many pub stopovers as we do campsites now, particularly during the off-season when are options are limited. Here the draw of a warm fire, a good meal and making new friends helps to keep the winter blues at bay while on an adventure.

However, the landscape of pub stopovers is dynamic, as they change ownership and management, or the new trade generated for landlords is outweighed by the problems that are created by it. This is why it is always worth phoning the pub first rather than simply assuming that you can stay in their car park overnight. Don't assume, check first.

The overriding theme, as with off-grid camping, is to be courteous and not to spoil it for other campers in your wake.

Ade and Kerry



Dog tired

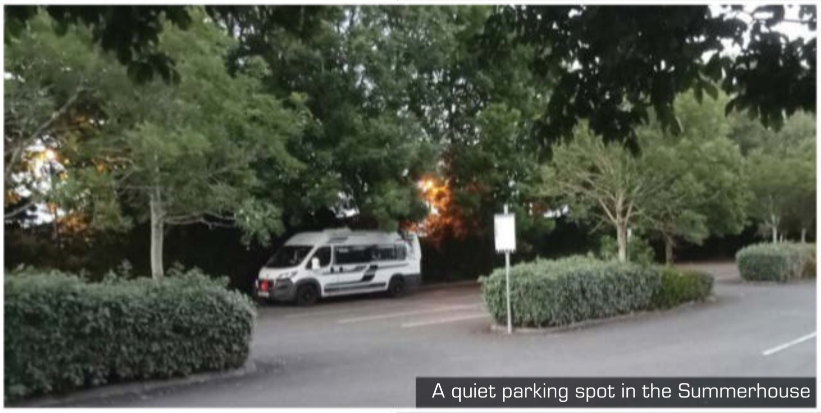
campervan
NEW VIEW

Essential pub reading!

Good standard pub grub

The Masons Arms in Somerset

MORE PARKING AND CAMP SITE



A quiet parking spot in the Summerhouse

HOT DAM!

The Elan Valley in mid-Wales is the definition of a hidden gem – a stunning place to visit but isn't widely known

Words & pictures ▮ **Liz Morrell**

I have to admit I'm not one for fighting the crowds when looking for somewhere new to explore in my 'van. I try to choose a location off the beaten track that's a bit less obvious than the norm.

Searching for inspiration recently, I flicked through my bucket list book, which has, by osmosis, evolved into a list of places I want to go to in my 'van. Elan Valley jumped out at me. I'd written it down after asking for recommendations for places to visit that weren't too far from my Bristol base, but I knew little more than its name. It was, however, supposed to be beautiful, was described as a hidden gem and was close to an almost wild campsite that also featured in my bucket list book. I set off on a road trip to discover it for myself.

Elan Valley is a strange but beautiful remote area in mid-Wales – you'll struggle for a mobile phone signal in some parts. I fell in love with Wales a few years ago; in some ways, it's a country that is a hidden gem in itself, boasting everything from towering mountain peaks to beautiful beaches.

It's no surprise that the remoteness of mid-Wales can be overlooked when there is so much to discover and the surrounding areas of Snowdonia, Brecon Beacons and

Pembrokeshire often steal the limelight.

The Elan Valley estate covers 72 sq miles, much of which is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is situated close to the town of Rhayader and consists of a series of Victorian and Edwardian dams and reservoirs.

These were built during the Industrial Revolution to solve water shortages in Birmingham. The growth of the city's population meant a need for new water supply storage solutions and Elan Valley and Claerwen Valley were deemed suitable for the job.

Today there are five dams on the River Elan. These include Caban Coch, Garreg Ddu, Pen y Garreg, Craig Goch and Nant y Gro, the latter of which, only the remains are now visible. There are also two on the River Claerwen – Dol y Mynach and Claerwen. Dol y Mynach isn't accessible by car and was never finished.

The valleys were purchased in 1892 and construction began the following year. Since it was a compulsory purchase, the tenant farmer occupants of the village were forced out and a railway line was built to connect the dams. Today it serves as the Elan Valley trail, a route that allows cyclists and walkers alike to explore the area.

Stones by Caban Coch

My appetite whetted and ready to find out more and see the area for myself, I head off to Coco's Wild Camp site, situated half an hour from the Elan Valley.

My first stop after a restful night's sleep is the Elan Valley Visitor Centre. Here I park up the 'van to find out more. It was a last-minute trip and at this point I still don't know much about the area.

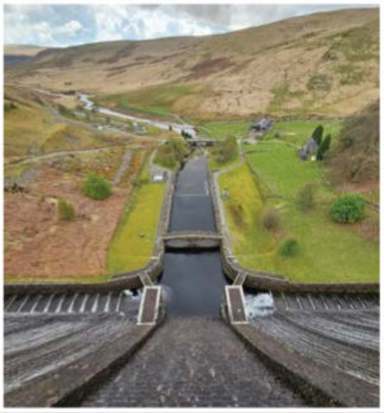
Entry to the visitor centre is free, although there is a small parking fee. The centre is operated by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and is a mine of information about what there is to see and do, in addition to wealth of history about the dams.

The centre is set against the first of the fully functional Victorian stone dams in the series, the Caban Coch dam, which is a five-minute walk away. Caban Coch, which means red cabin, is the lowest of the dams and was the first to be built. It stands 37m high and was designed to resemble a waterfall when the reservoir is full and water pours over its 186m length.

Close to the Caban Coch reservoir, along the edge of the woods overlooking the water, are the remains of Nant y Gro – or gravelly steam – dam, an 11m high, 58m long structure. It was designed to provide Elan village and its

Elan Valley Trail
Llwybr Cwm Elan

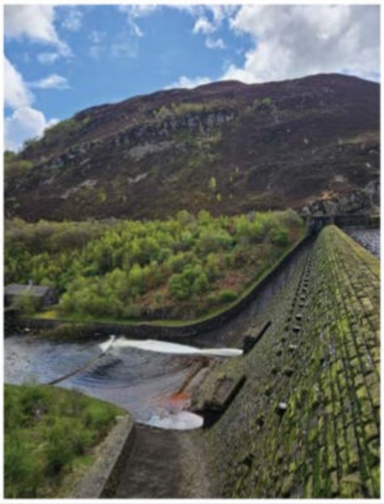
Claeren view


Claerwen Dam from the top

WELCOME
Canmlwyddiant Elan Centenary
Elan Valley Visitor Centre

Garreg Ddu Viaduct

Bridge by Caban Coch dam

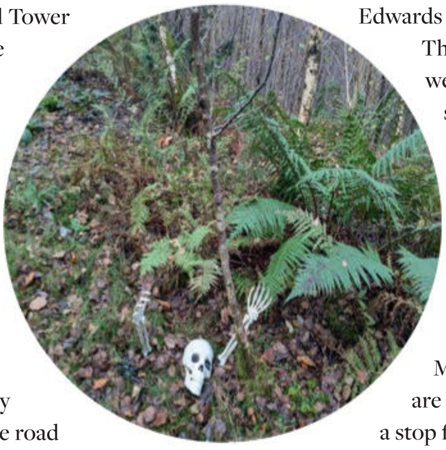


Caban Coch in the spring

workers with water. However, it was later abandoned and was used in testing by Sir Barnes Neville Wallis, the inventor of the bouncing bomb that was used by the RAF 617 Squadron Dam Busters in World War II, who tested the explosives at the site. You can watch a video of the test in the exhibition hall of the Elan Valley Visitor Centre.

From Caban Coch, the road takes you up to Garreg Ddu, or black stone dam. This 20m-high, 180m-long dam is submerged and only visible when the reservoir water level is low. Its purpose is to hold back water to enter the Foel Tower (the green tower in the photographs) which then feeds through from Elan to Birmingham by the Elan aqueduct which is buried underground and whose route is apparently a closely guarded secret.

Though the dam may not be visible, the stone road bridge viaduct which runs across it is stunning, and I park the 'van here for a wander. From this point you can head over the bridge to the Nantgwyllt Chapel of Ease, which was built at the same time as the dams, replacing the medieval church that was submerged along with the rest of the village. It celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. You can also carry on along this road to Claerwen Dam, only I didn't realise that at the time!



Continuing the drive to the next dam, I come across some unexpected woodland sculptures in tree stumps lining the edge of the road. It turns out these are part of the Elan Valley sculpture trail and were created by a trio of carvers, Simon O'Rourke, Paul Edwards and Matthew Crabb.

The Elan Valley carvings were chosen by schoolchildren in the area and include local birds (carved by Simon) such as owls and the famous red kites of mid-Wales, as well as animals such as badgers, which were carved by Paul and Matthew. The sculptures are charming and well worth a stop for a photograph or two, so keep an eye out for them on your tour of the area.

Pen y Garreg, or head of the stone, is next on my list. It's often referred to as the middle

Garreg Ddu

Capel Anwes Nantgwyllt
Nantgwyllt Chapel of Ease

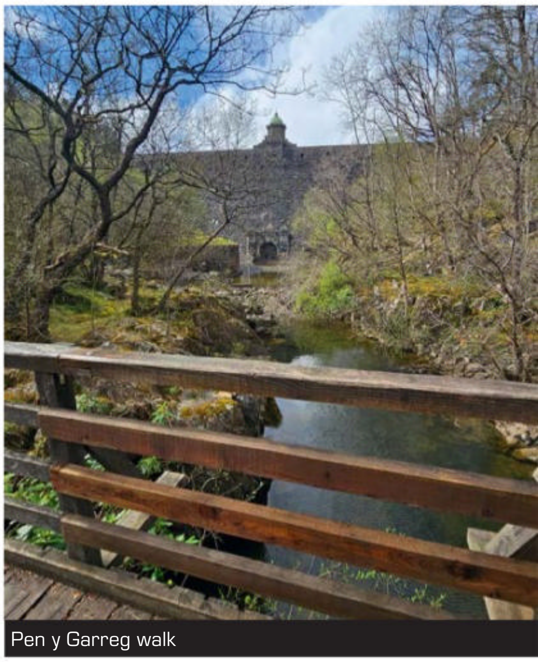
Nantgwylltt Chapel of Ease by Garreg Ddu

Claerwen Reservoir

Cronfa Ddŵr
Claerwen
Reservoir

Craig Goch Reservoir

CRAIG GOCH RESERVOIR



Pen y Garreg walk

dam. For this one I park and follow a short woodland walk to the dam itself. This is the only dam that visitors can venture inside, on a selection of open days.

It features a narrow corridor with windows looking out downstream which means that when water is streaming over the top you are effectively standing behind the dam – a rather eerie experience. You can even get married inside the central tower.

After Pen y Garreg I follow the road to what has to be one of the most striking of the dams – Craig Goch, or red rock, which is also known as the top dam. Standing 317m above sea level, the 156m-wide dam is the highest upstream and was completed in 1904.

Craig Goch was also the site of the official opening of the Elan Valley dam scheme by King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra on 21 July, 1904.

It features a series of arches through which the water spills, with a roadway across the top. The images of it in full flow are stunning and are often used to highlight the beauty of the Elan Valley. Sadly, it's dry on my visit.

Apparently, your best chance of seeing the dams in action is in late winter or early spring after rain. Craig Goch also marks the end point of the Elan Valley trail with the track running alongside the dam back to Rhayader. From this point, you can head on via the B4574, a mountain road that links Rhayader and Devil's Bridge. This route is described by the AA as one of the 10 top scenic drives in the world.

I was running late on my visit and have to admit that the words 'mountain', and 'Devil's Bridge' were enough to make me think twice and I chickened out of the drive.

A few months later, though, my friend and fellow 'van owner, Anna Moore, drove the route on my behalf. She agreed with the AA and said it's a definite must-do as part of the Elan Valley experience – especially in a 'van.

My final stop before heading back to the campsite is Claerwen Dam. To find this I retrace my route back to the Garreg Ddu Viaduct and follow the road from there. It's a longer drive and, like many parts of the route, the road is narrow and often deserted.

When I finally arrive, Claerwen feels the most remote of all the dams. It has a different aura entirely.

The scenery is at its most rugged here but is still stunningly beautiful. There's hardly anyone around and those that are lurk furtively like they've found hidden treasure. A fork in the road leads me to either the bottom car park or to the top. Obviously, I have to try both for the full impact.

If you were a *Top Gear* fan in 2015 then Claerwen may seem familiar to you. If not, it's definitely worth heading over to YouTube to see the clip I'm talking about. In a show celebrating the Land Rover Defender, daredevil presenter, Richard Hammond, was winched up the dam in a 64-year-old version of the vehicle, recreating an advert from the 1980s.

Standing 56m high and 355m wide, the Claerwen Dam holds back the water from a reservoir which is almost the same size as that of the three previous dams. Although this one was built in concrete, dressed stone was added to ensure it tied in with the other structures in the dam collection.

After some more exploring, a cuppa and a chill at the dam I finally head back to the campsite tired but happy. I may not have caught any of the dams in spill (when the water flows over) but it doesn't matter. They are stunning spectacles in their own right and it was a great autumn day out.

THINGS TO DO IN THE ELAN VALLEY

WALKING

There are a variety of walks ranging in complexity within the Elan Valley. These range from easy family-friendly walks - such as the 30-minute, one mile stroll around Cnwch Wood next to the visitor centre - to the Elan Valley Trail, a route that starts in Cwmdauddwr close to Rhayader, passes by the Elan Valley Visitor Centre and finishes nine miles later at Craig Goch dam. There are free leaflets available in the visitor centre that show the easier routes while the gift shop sells a variety of maps for those wanting to tackle a more complicated walk. The visitor centre staff are also great at explaining what might best suit you.

CYCLING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING

You can also cycle the Elan Valley trail, bringing your own bike or hiring one from the visitor centre. Their range includes ebikes, trail, mountain and children's bikes which can be booked in advance or hired on the day. Adult bike hire starts from £25 and ebikes from £40 although you will need photo ID which will be retained during the hire. You are supplied with bicycle helmets, a repair kit and a cycle map with each hire although bringing your own helmet is recommended to save time on fitting. For braver mountain bikers there also are several routes to try out in the Elan Valley. These include two downhill skills tracks situated a mile from the visitor centre which start from the Nantgwyllt Church car park. These were built with funding from the National Lottery and the Welsh government's TAIS fund and include a 1.5km blue route and a 1km red route. Suitable for intermediate to experienced mountain bikers the routes include drop-offs, sweeping berms, tabletop jumps and tight beds. The Ceidwad Coch red route, meanwhile, is a longer circular route of around 30 km from the visitor centre which will take you around two hours to complete, although you should also leave time to take in the views it offers.

STARGAZING

Ten years ago, in 2015, the Elan Estate was named the first privately owned, publicly accessible International Dark Sky Park in the world. So if star gazing and nocturnal wildlife hold a fascination for you then you have another reason to head down to the Elan Valley. The importance of its dark sky rating remains today with any additional infrastructure having to conform to an approved standard in order to minimise light pollution. The Elan Valley website suggests five key sites for stargazing on the Elan Estate. These include Claerwen car park, Craig Goch car park, Pont Ar Elan car park, Claerwen dam and Teifi Pools.

Mountain pass drive

BIRDWATCHING AND WILDLIFE SPOTTING

The Elan Estate is a heavily protected area that remains unspoilt. The consequence is that wildlife has been able to thrive. There are more than 200 species of mammals – including badgers, otter and shrews, six different species of bats and twenty-seven species of butterflies. If you are interested in birdwatching then at least 179 different species of birds have been recorded in the area – several of which are red-listed birds which means that their population is globally threatened. Birds ranging from the grey wagtail to the dipper can be seen at Cnwch Woods which sits on the south side of the River Elan opposite the Elan visitor centre. In nearby Penbont Woods you can see warblers and redstarts flying around.

WATCH RED KITES FEEDING

One of the most famous sights in this area, however, is that of the red kites. These birds of prey fly across the Elan Valley and beyond. If you have time it's also worth heading to the Gigrin Farm Red Kite Feeding Centre which is located half a mile from Rhayader. Here hundreds of wild red kites are fed daily. You can watch them from general hides or specialist photographic hides. However, the sight is popular and as such the farm's owners recommend booking ahead to avoid disappointment.

FISHING

Fly fishing in the area is by permit only. These can be bought on an individual reservoir basis or for the whole estate from the visitor centre, or from the local angling association in Hafod Hardware in Rhayader. You will need a rod licence in order to obtain the permit, however.

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SETTLING YOUR DOG ON HOLIDAY

WORDS:
Mike Hallam,
Your Dog Editor

Elizaveta/stock.adobe.com

You have booked your getaway and it's time to start packing. Most confident dogs will adapt to a new situation without much stress, but for anxious dogs it can take a little longer.

THE ESSENTIAL KIT

There are a host of things you'll need to take away with you, including:

✔ Lead – check your lead is in good condition and be sure to pack it as most attractions will only let in dogs on leads
✔ Collars and harness
✔ Bedding
✔ Towels – to dry your dog off after any walks or swims!
✔ Dog food – take enough for the duration of your holiday
✔ Treats
✔ Bowls
✔ Poo bags
✔ Brushes
✔ Canine first aid kit
✔ Tick remover kit – removing ticks safely is key to reducing the risk of infection
✔ Toys
✔ Pet insurance – ensure your insurance is in date before you go
✔ Pheromone diffuser or spray

HELP SETTLE YOUR DOG

Your doggy suitcase includes a few key items for helping your dog settle. Probably the most important is your dog's bed. If you can take the regular bed with you that will help the surroundings to feel familiar. If you can't fit your pet's bed in, then it could be an idea to get them using the travel bed at home before you go away.

Pheromone sprays and diffusers contain a synthetic copy of natural calming pheromones that dogs release. Using one of these can help your dog settle and gain that extra reassurance on your getaway.

Your dog's toys are also really useful at making their surroundings feel more familiar. Take a variety of toys and rotate them throughout your break. They will contain scents that they recognise and will help them settle as they provide lots of fun!

ON ARRIVAL

When you get to where you are staying, make it a top priority to show your dog where you expect them to toilet. For the first couple of days, take them out regularly to minimise the risks of accidents while they get used to a new area to do their business.

Check out your new home away from home yourself, too. This gives you chance to identify any potential risks such as other dogs, unsecure fencing and anything that could cause injury. Be sure that you know the details of the nearest veterinary surgery, wherever you go on holiday, just in case you need it in an emergency (of course, hopefully you won't!).

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LIFE BEYOND BRICKS

Tash enjoys a relaxing short stop in Gloucestershire

HI

Remember my postponed trip from a little while ago? I managed to reschedule with my friend and headed off to... Tewkesbury!

She has been going through some family-related circumstances and the advantage of being mobile means I was able to go to her. I packed up the Doblo, got a care package together and hit the road.

She is also in a small campervan, but we didn't book into a campsite. As we were only meeting up for one night, we opted to use the Gloucester Road Car Park on the outskirts of town. It was free after 6pm and only cost £4.50 for the day, so it was ideal. Plus, there are public toilets open during the day. We are both completely self-contained but it's always great to have facilities at your disposal! There is some road noise but after hours it all quietens down.

I will note that the spaces are all small in this car park. There are a couple that could accommodate bigger vehicles but I wouldn't park anything over 5.5m long here, 6.2m max if you can nab one of the bigger spaces!

After some hugs and yapping, we headed into town to have a mooch. This is the same friend I visited Ironbridge with previously, and we both LOVE a wander around antique and charity shops. Of course, Tewkesbury is ideal for this and, coupled with the historic architecture and pretty backdrop of the river, it makes for an amazing place to visit.

Naturally we started with a stroll through the abbey grounds. The trees and shrubs were in bloom so it was incredibly pretty. That also added to the serene vibe of the abbey itself, complimented by locals and visitors milling about enjoying the space.

You would think our first stop would be the aforementioned shops but it was, in fact, the pub. Nothing beats a shandy on a pleasant afternoon and we couldn't resist nipping into the oldest pub in Tewkesbury, the Black Bear, for a swift one.

Then it was on to the shops! Starting at the Bear was also a tactical move because it's at the other end of town, meaning we could then meander back towards the 'vans. The quality of goods in the charity shops was amazing as well, my friend managed to pick up a couple of outfits for some upcoming family events for less than £10.

It's times like this as well that I'm sure my husband, Jon, is grateful we don't have a house anymore because I would be picking up all sorts of wonderful trinkets from the antique emporiums. But I have to make do with browsing these days, otherwise the inside of our 'van would look like an antique emporium.

We stopped for the most delicious mocha in Café au Chocolat before retiring to the 'vans to chill out and do yet more yapping. I usually love to spend in local establishments but dinner later was at a reasonably priced chain pub, because that's how I am able to balance my budget when exploring.

After a peaceful night, we headed out to grab breakfast and, to our delight, found there was a local market on. One half was food and drink, the other was crafts. It was the perfect way to finish off our 24-hour mini-break. We both ended up buying some locally sourced cheese and I got the cutest handmade lavender hanger. Jon couldn't object to that because it's small and weighs nothing! A win for me and for the local craft makers.

♥ Read more about Tash and Jon's adventures at **lifebeyondbricks.co.uk** and follow them on social media

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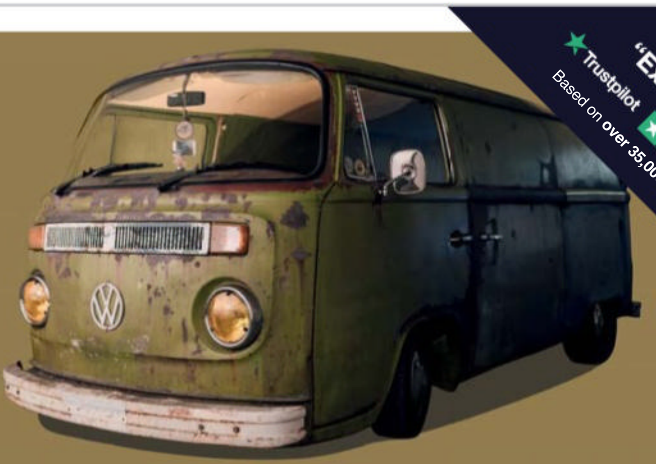

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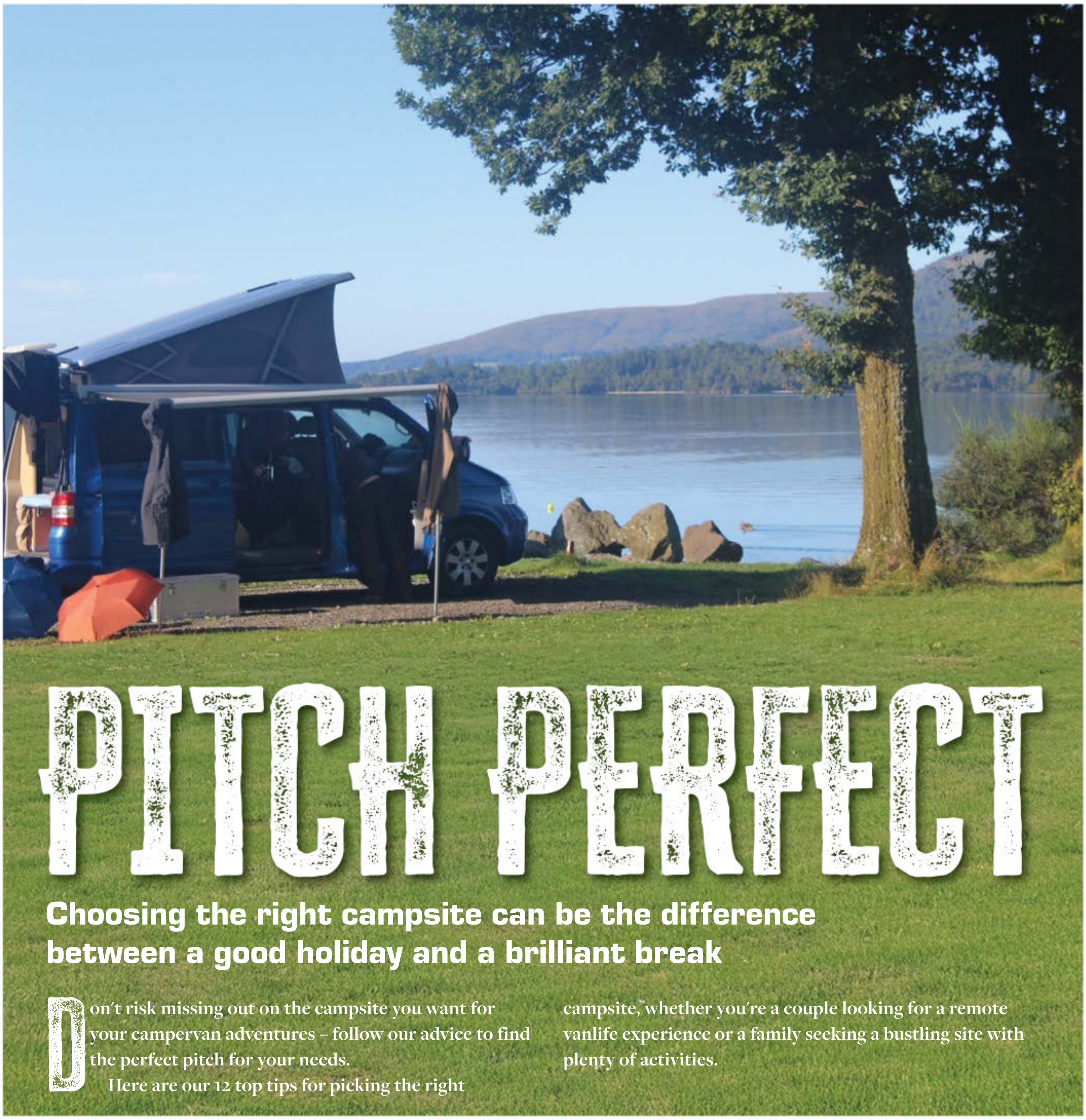


PITCH PERFECT

Choosing the right campsite can be the difference between a good holiday and a brilliant break

Don't risk missing out on the campsite you want for your campervan adventures – follow our advice to find the perfect pitch for your needs.

Here are our 12 top tips for picking the right campsite, whether you're a couple looking for a remote vanlife experience or a family seeking a bustling site with plenty of activities.

out&about
Campsite Finder
outandaboutlive.co.uk
The best places to stay in the UK & Europe...
specially selected for the perfect getaway

1 USE CAMPSITE FINDER TO EXPLORE THE UK

This is your starting point. Featuring hundreds of high-quality destinations, Campsite Finder is our directory of the best campsites in the UK, stretching from Cornwall to the Cairngorms and everywhere in between. Use filters to explore sites according to your personal criteria, including dog friendly, adults only, family friendly and more!

W outandaboutlive.co.uk/campsites/campsite-finder

2 LOOK FOR A SITE NEAR WATER

The best campsites all seem to be close to water. Fishing, swimming and water sports are all favourite activities for campervanners – but you might just want to sit and listen to the gentle flow of a river or stream. Whether it's a swimming pool, the sea, a lake or a river, a good campsite will almost certainly have water on site or nearby.

3 CHECK THE CAMPSITE LOCATION ON A MAP

A campsite well away from the main road or railway lines means you won't be worrying about traffic noise or being awakened by the 0605 express to London.

korev
THE COURTYARD BAR
OPEN TUES-SAT
(6 - 10.30PM)
LIVE MUSIC EVERY THURSDAY
(8:15PM)
GRAB A TASTE OF THE COAST

4 FIND THINGS TO DO NEARBY

Look for a campsite with lovely views and easy access to the surrounding countryside. But also find out whether there are rainy day options within a reasonable distance – a local cinema, museum or even an indoor games room on the campsite.

PICTIONARY
SCRABBLE
TABOO
MONOPOLY

5 CHECK THE CAMPSITE RULES

Some campsites have a families-only, or families and couples-only, policy and many have a quiet time starting from around 10.30pm. Check whether you like the sound of any lights-out policy – or lack of one.

6 CHECK THE FACILITIES ARE GOOD QUALITY

Make sure the site has good shower and toilet facilities, especially if you don't have a washroom in your campervan.

7 IS THE SITE KID-FRIENDLY?

If you're travelling with kids, make sure the site is child-friendly. It doesn't need to have a formal playground, but make sure there's lots of space to play ball games and ride bikes, or natural play areas like woods to hide in or rocks to scramble over. And if you'd rather avoid children completely, go for an adults-only site.

8 CONFIRM IF CAMPFIRES ARE ALLOWED

For many campervanners, no trip is complete without toasting marshmallows over a campfire, so if that's you, make sure your preferred site allows you to build a fire to sit around at night.

9 CHECK YOUR SITE IS PET-FRIENDLY

If you're planning on bringing the family pooch along, make sure the campsite allows dogs to stay.

10 LOOK FOR A LOCAL SHOP

Does the site have its own shop or easy access to a local store? You'll be grateful if you run out of milk and bread...

11 FIND THE NEAREST PUB/RESTAURANT

If you're planning to eat out at night rather than cooking in your 'van, a pub on the site or within easy walking distance will come in handy.

12 MAKE IT A COLLECTIVE DECISION

Get everyone involved in choosing the site so no one can complain when they get there. Recommendations from friends can be helpful, too.

WHERE TO PITCH

You've found the ideal campsite. Now you have to decide exactly where on the campsite you want to park up

Would you rather be on a spot with a great view? Close to the toilet block? As far away as possible from the clubhouse? Under trees for shade?

There are pros and cons to all of the options, so you need to weigh up what suits you best. Whatever you decide, if you are staying at a campsite for several days, it certainly pays dividends to stay have pitch that you enjoy rather than endure. Even if you are moving on each day, why put up with a pitch that is less than satisfactory?

Unfortunately, on some campsites you'll simply be told where to park up when you arrive depending on how busy it is and what's available at the time. Happily, most site owners and managers are friendly, helpful and happy to accommodate reasonable requests and usually there will be some negotiation and flexibility possible, but your choice may be limited.

WHAT IS THE BEST LOCATION?

The first thing to do is decide where you want to be on the campsite and for that there are a few things to consider. The pluses and minuses of convenience, noise and traffic need to be weighed up and balanced out.

Avoiding being near the site entrance and reception is a no-brainer for many. It is likely to be the spot with the heaviest passing traffic, with car doors slamming, radios playing and engines running. However, there are some benefits to being near the site entrance; you're likely to be close to the shop and the strongest WiFi signal.

Setting up near the wash block will mean it's an easy walk to the showers, which will be appreciated by anyone who doesn't have onboard facilities, especially if the weather is bad. But again, passing traffic could be an issue, this time on foot. And depending on the quality of the facilities, they may smell and if it's warm, you may get the fragrant aroma of bins that haven't been emptied for a few days.

Pitching near the kids' play area can be really handy if you're camping with youngsters and like to keep a close eye on them to make sure they are safe. The disadvantage is, of course, the noise and the fact that you're within earshot of every argument and playground dispute.

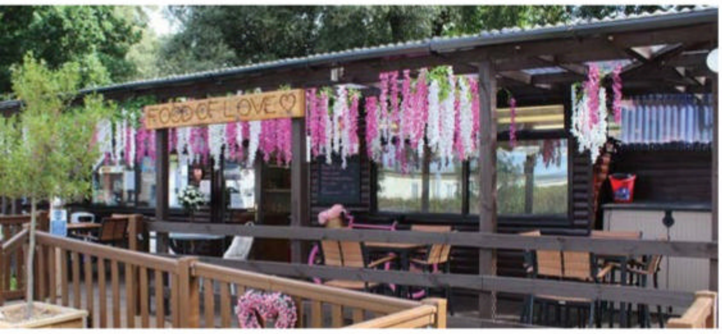
If you're after peace and seclusion, then the very farthest corner of the site, away from kids' play areas, the entrance and the toilet block, is probably for you.

PITCHING NEAR TREES AND HEDGES

Hedges and trees are great for offering privacy and shelter from sun, rain and wind, but they can house all sorts of wildlife and insects, which can be noisy and messy.

The gentle sound of wind through the leaves will either send you to sleep or keep you awake – as will the sound of raindrops falling on your roof well after the downpour has passed. Sap, bird lime, falling branches and midges are yet more hazards you may want to avoid by pitching away from a tree's overhang.

Being set-up on top of a hill or cliff can be a prime spot especially if there are stunning views to be had. But it can also mean you are exposed if the wind gets up or the rain comes rolling in, especially if you're by the coast.



KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER

- **SIZE** Is the pitch big enough and the right shape for your tent?
- **LOCATION** How far away are the loos and showers?
- **PEOPLE TRAFFIC** Are you on a through route to amenities?
- **STYLE OF PITCH** Is the pitch formally marked out or does the campsite take a free and easy approach?
- **TREES** Shade or shadow?
- **PITCH FACILITIES** Do you want electricity, water, etc at your pitch?
- **PITCH SURFACE** Grass, gravel or tarmac?
- **WHAT'S THE VIEW LIKE?** Seaview, neighbours' campervan or the rubbish bins?

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NEWS

Find out what's going on in the world of campervanning

HYBRID VW CALIFORNIA NOW ON SALE

The eHybrid version of the new VW California has gone on sale.

Prices start at £71,295 for the California Beach Camper eHybrid, £78,495 for the California Coast trim, and £85,395 for the top-spec California Ocean. Finance packages start from £739 per month on 0% APR with hire purchase.

The new eHybrid versions, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles' first-ever plug-in hybrid campervan, come with 4Motion all-wheel drive. Featuring a combined output of 245hp (more than the diesel or pure petrol versions), the new powertrain option combines an electric motor with a high-tech 1.5 TSI petrol engine.

For everyday motoring, the 19.7kWh lithium-ion battery delivers a WLTP range of 54 miles of pure electric range, while it has a towing capacity of up to 1,600kg.

The new eHybrid models are available in a choice of trim levels – Beach Camper, Coast and Ocean, each with two sliding doors as standard. The Beach Camper has a rear galley, accessed through the open tailgate, while the Coast and Ocean models have the typical side kitchen campervan layout.

HONDA LAUNCHES CAMPING CAR CONCEPT

Honda has revealed a unique car camping concept inspired by Japan's capsule hotels.

The Dream Pod was designed to celebrate 30 years of its CR-V compact SUV.

Based on the manufacturer's first plug-in hybrid model for Europe, it has been created to deliver off-grid adventures.

Designed as a campervan alternative, it features cooking facilities, a washbasin and additional home comforts.

The Dream Pod also provides sleeping space for two people, and was built using specialist camping equipment, genuine Honda accessories and some bespoke features, bringing home comfort to the great outdoors.

It is based on the CR-V e:PHEV, which offers 49 miles EV range and is fitted with SENSING 360 – Honda's omnidirectional safety and driver-assist system.

Although the Dream Pod is a concept, you can buy individual components to build your own version.

EU TRAVEL UPDATE

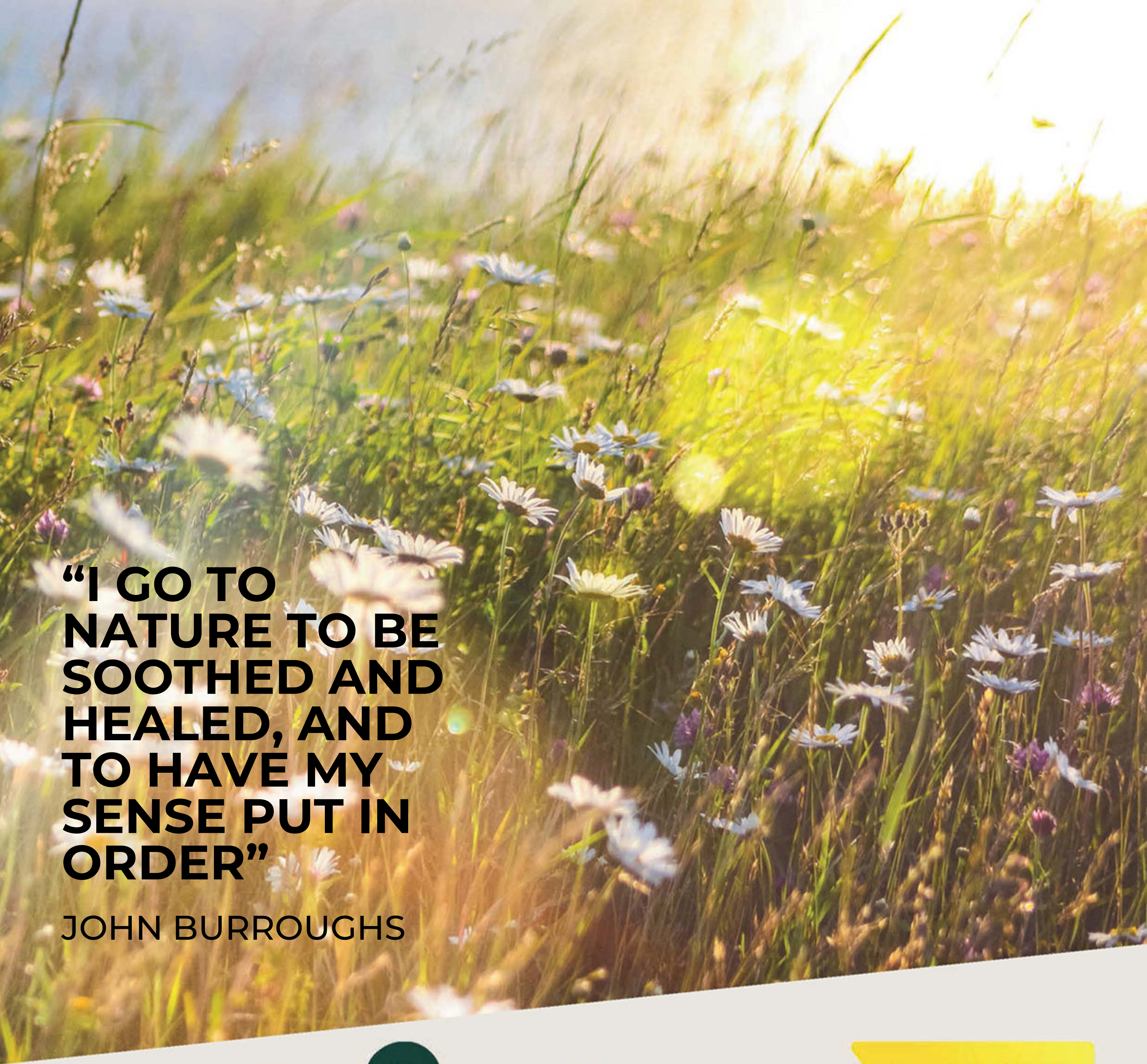
The new EU digital border system is expected to go live in October 2025, having been postponed on multiple occasions prior.

The EES (Entry/Exit System) for registering non-EU nationals for short stays, was originally planned for 2022; however, it was then delayed to May 2023 and then pushed to 2024. The latest indication is that the EES will be in operation in October 2025.

The EES will impact travellers who are not from EU member states – including UK citizens – who will need to hold a valid ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) travel authorisation.

The EES will collect the data listed on your travel documents such as your full name and date of birth, the date and place of each entry and exit, your biometric data and whether you have been refused entry previously. The personal data collected will then be accessible by authorities in all European countries using the EES such as border, visa and immigration authorities.

The ETIAS is valid for up to three years or until the passport expires. With a valid ETIAS travel authorisation, an individual can travel as much as they would like for up to 90 days in any 180-day period. It is expected to go live in the last quarter of 2025.



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JOHN BURROUGHS

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MELVICH BAY
CARAVAN PARK

NEW BEACHSIDE SITE OPENS ON NC500 ROUTE

A new 30-pitch campsite has opened on the popular North Coast 500 (NC500) route in the Scottish Highlands.

Melvich Bay Caravan Park sits near the village of Melvich, just above the beach, offering panoramic views across the North Atlantic Ocean and towards Orkney. The 25-acre site features hardstanding pitches for campervans and motorhomes, along with electricity, water, waste water disposal, family bathrooms and strong mobile coverage.

The park is located between Thurso and Bettyhill, with shops and a café within walking distance. Pitches measure 12 square metres and overnight stays can be booked for £35 through the park's website.

Director, Angus Forbes, a local farmer and contractor, said the site aims to improve facilities along the busy NC500 and support the local economy. "We recognised that logistical and hospitality support had a bit of catching up to do," he said. "This project is about providing high-quality facilities in a stunning setting."

Melvich lies on the A836, with the A897 connecting the area to Helmsdale via the Strath of Kildonan.

DEALER EXPANDS WITH NEW 12-BAY WORKSHOP

Grantham's
BUY WITH CONFIDENCE

East Midlands campervan dealer, Grantham's, has officially opened a new 12-bay workshop to boost the company's service and repair capacity. The new workshop will also serve as the primary training centre for aspiring NCC-certified technicians in the Midlands.

Paul Connolly, Director at Grantham's, said: "This expansion represents a major step forward for us as a business and as a team. It's about more than just increasing our capacity—it's about investing in the future of the leisure industry and our community. We're proud to be creating new jobs locally while continuing to raise the standard of service for our customers. This is just the first phase of what's to come, and we're excited about the journey ahead."

Grantham's says the new workshop is part of a wider development strategy. The long-term development strategy includes a new multi-purpose building which will feature an indoor awning and accessory display area, a new service reception, sales and office space, a café for customers and staff, and boardroom facilities for training and meetings.

The company sells new campervans and motorhomes from Bailey, Joa Camp, Moto-Trek and McLouis as well as a wide selection of used leisure vehicles.

REVEALED: THE MOST UNUSUAL PETS ON THE CAMPSITE

There's nothing strange about dogs on campsites – in fact many people go camping because it means their four-legged friends can join them on holiday. But with the recent sunny weather inspiring a surge in campsite bookings it seems that many campers are bringing along some more unusual pets.

According to the Caravan and Motorhome Club, all sorts of weird and wonderful creatures are turning up on its network of campsites, from feline friends to scaly sidekicks and cold-blooded companions.

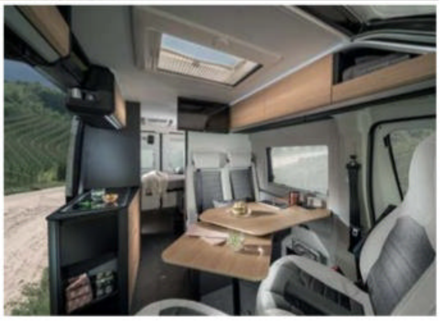
The Club says unusual pets that have been spotted enjoying the great outdoors include cats, bearded dragon reptiles, snakes, rabbits and, possibly most unlikely of all, fish.

Meanwhile, another survey conducted by the Club has revealed that 86% of dog owners bring their dog along on their campervan, motorhome or caravan holidays, as they are considered to be a part of the family.

The most popular breed is the Labrador with 22%. A close second was the Golden Retriever with 18%, and Jack Russells, Cocker Spaniels, and mixed breed rescue dogs.

ADRIA LAUNCHES SPECIAL 60TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPERVAN

WATCH THE VIDEO
motorhome.ma/AdriaTwin60



Adria is celebrating throughout 2025 as this year marks its 60th anniversary as a producer of leisure vehicles. This year is also significant for the Slovenian manufacturer as it reached the major milestone of the production and sale of its 55,000th campervan and its 100,000th motorhome.

To mark the diamond anniversary year, the company has launched a special limited edition range of one campervan and two coachbuilt motorhomes.

The exclusive anniversary models have up to £11,000-worth of extra equipment included as standard and have only been created in limited numbers. This means buyers need to be quick if they want to get one of these high-spec models, which are already on sale at Adria's 27 motorhome and campervan dealers across the UK.

The trio of special edition 'vans are all based on automatic Fiat Ducatos and are easily identifiable with their exclusive silver paintwork and graphics, which mark them out as special edition models.

All are built at Adria's manufacturing plants in Slovenia and feature premium materials, new design details and many additional features not found on the standard edition models upon which they are based.

The first of the special edition models – and the only campervan – is the Twin 60 Years Selection, which is based on the two-berth Adria Twin Supreme 640 SGX and features a rear double bed that can be raised electrically to create a large garage beneath (large enough for cycles).

Priced at £75,945, this exclusive model has everything the Fiat Ducato-based 6.36m-long Supreme 640 SGX is fitted with as standard, plus exclusive Limited Edition 60Y upholstery, textiles to mark this out as a special edition model on the interior and 60Y graphics on the exterior to complement Fiat's Artense Grey paint. Also on the exterior are additional features including 16in bicolour alloy wheels, colour-coded matching bumpers, a black skid plate and front fog lights.

On the interior, in addition to the exclusive anniversary upholstery and textiles is an exclusive wood décor, premium wood table with extension and cup holder and even a special 60Y chopping board in the kitchen.

The already very highly specified campervan also comes with a premium Evopore mattress on the rear bed, a Webasto diesel heating system, Adria's Duplex Bathroom, which features a swivel wall to enhance space for showering, a TV holder, heated waste water tank, a flyscreen on the sliding door, plus windscreen and side door blinds, Adria's Media Nav Pack and Mach app, a gas oven and grill, a lithium leisure battery, electric converter and Fiat's 140bhp engine coupled with an automatic transmission. It has an awning and panoramic roof window as standard.

• **See review on page 74**

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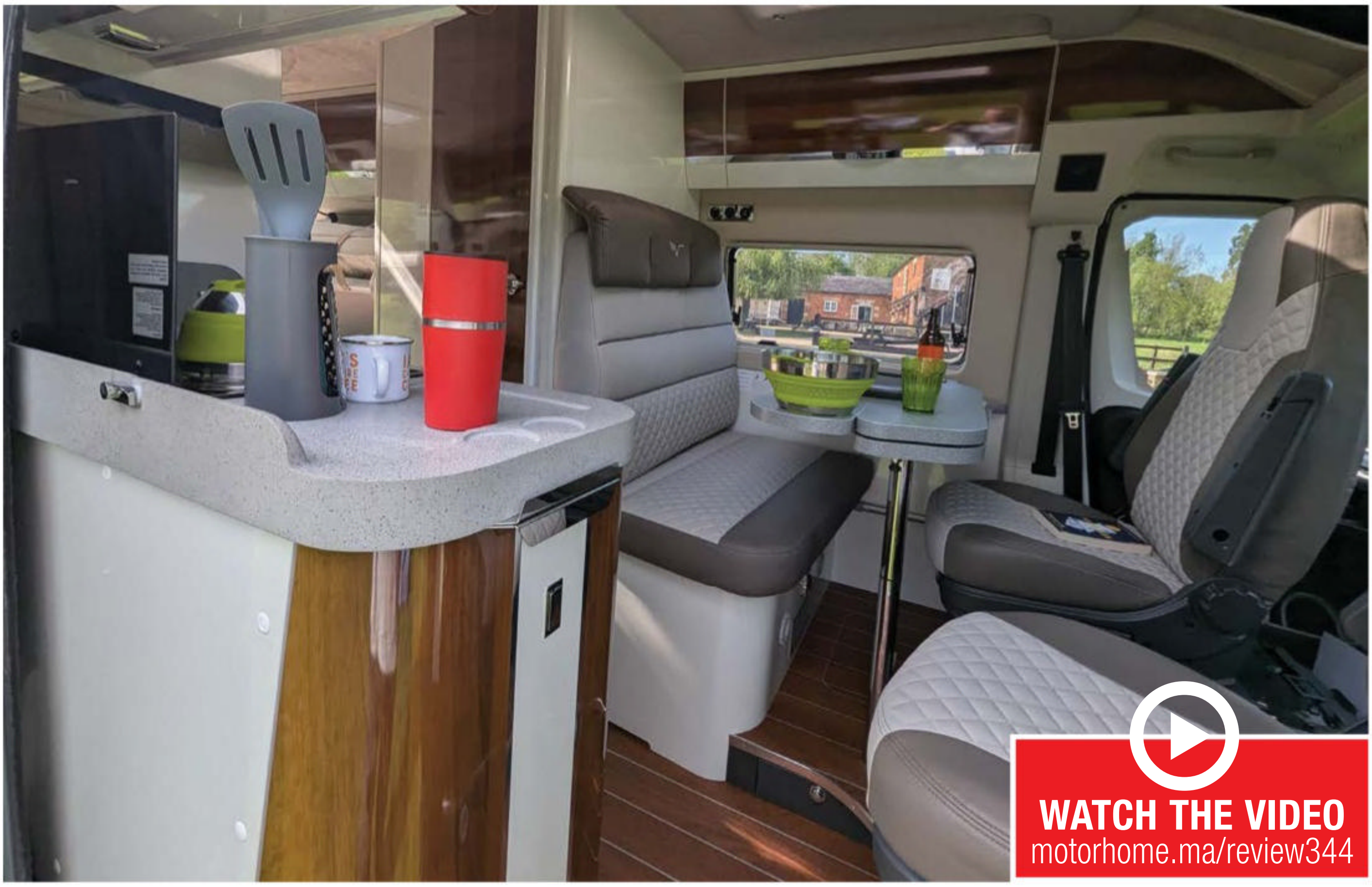
REVIEWED

MOBILVETTA ADMIRAL K6.3

The Mobilvetta Admiral has made a splash since arriving from Italy – but does it float your boat or are we going overboard with praise?

Words & pictures
Iain Duff


WATCH THE VIDEO
motorhome.ma/review344

Mobilvetta is an Italian brand best known in this country for its luxury motorhomes (both A-classes and low-profiles) inspired by nautical design. But 2025 sees a campervan join its UK line-up for the first time – the Admiral K6.3.

The marine influence is obvious in the name; I've seen it described as a luxury yacht on wheels, and I get that. Not surprisingly, this campervan exudes Italian style. But there are clever design touches in there as well to add some practicality, so it's in no way style over substance.

First impressions are that this is a striking looking 'van on the outside – black with silver trim and graphics and a set of 16in alloys. It certainly has a touch of bling about it and it's perhaps not to everyone's taste, but if you do like shiny stuff, there's plenty more of that inside; polished wood, curved corners, gleaming handles and premium fabrics. Remember, though, that black might not be the best colour for a campervan if you're heading off to hotter climes...

Like Mobilvetta's motorhomes, also imported into the UK by Marquis, this is a high-end model, with interiors that reflect the coachbuilt models. There's definitely a nautical influence at play inside. For me, it also evokes a sort of Art Deco style reminiscent of the golden age of rail travel. Either way, it's pretty fancy, but in a more classical way than some of the modern interior design stylings we're seeing in many 'vans these days.

For a fiver short of £80,000, the spec list is impressive: a Truma Combi 4 heating system, a 200W solar panel, 16in alloy wheels and a Thule awning to name but a few. You also don't have to contend with a list of optional extras that can leave you wondering how that "reasonably priced 'van" is now going to set you back the best part of £100,000. What you see here, and what you pay, is exactly what you get.

KITCHEN CREATIVITY

The Admiral has the standard fixed bed layout of many continental campervans – two single beds at the back that can be converted into a double, a central kitchen and washroom, and a front half-dinette lounge incorporating the driver and passenger cab seats.

It's all done very well, but where this 'van really stands out is with its innovative features. The kitchen is pretty compact, but to address that issue, the stone-effect sink, mixer tap and chopping board are all hidden away under a sliding worktop, and can be easily revealed when needed without losing work surface space.

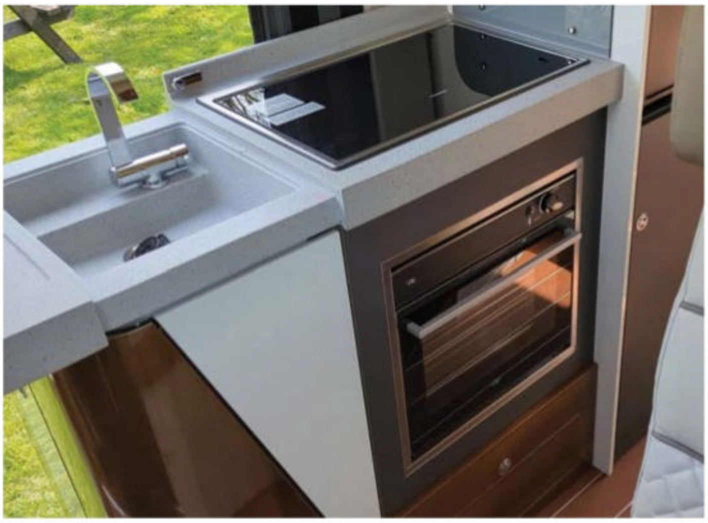
PROS

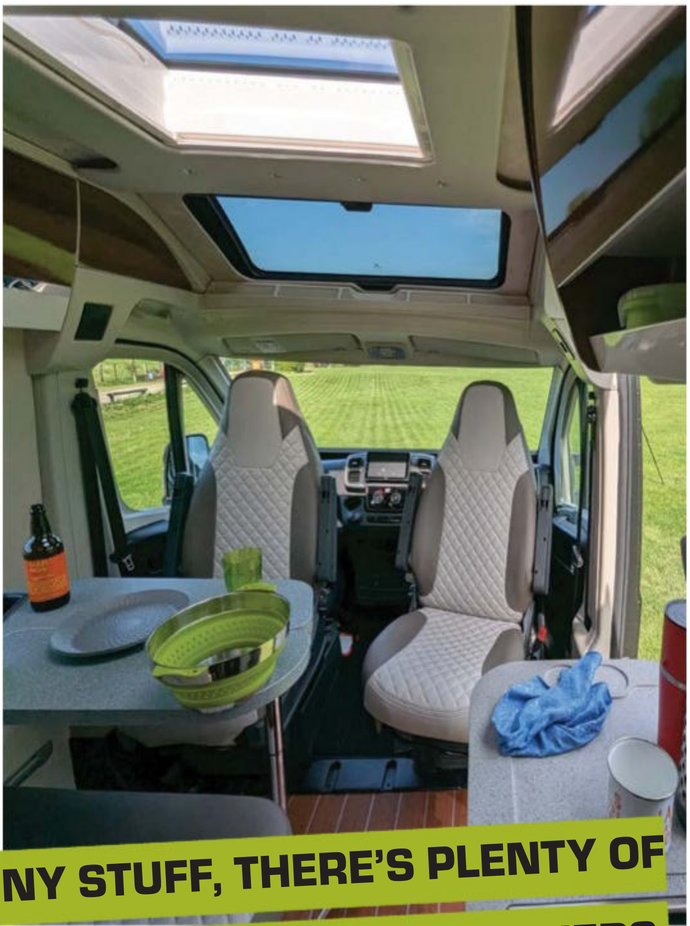
- Slide-out worktop with 'hidden' kitchen sink
- Folding dining table creates more room
- Swing-wall shower
- Oven and grill in kitchen

x

CONS

- Narrow gap between kitchen and washroom
- Position of kitchen main socket
- Limited kitchen storage





IF YOU LIKE SHINY STUFF, THERE'S PLENTY OF THAT INSIDE; POLISHED WOOD, CURVED CORNERS, GLEAMING HANDLES AND PREMIUM FABRICS

There's also a slide-out larder unit underneath, which makes up in part for the limited amount of kitchen drawer space. The unit is great for storing food but it wouldn't be large enough for pots and pans, nor would the cutlery drawer under the oven.

Apart from the innovative sink, the galley is a fairly standard side kitchen layout, with an overhead cupboard, a spice rack and a good-sized fridge. Alongside that nifty hidden kitchen sink is the cooker – the hob only has two gas burners but the grill and oven, uncommon in continental campervans but always popular among UK buyers, provide you with alternative cooking options.

The 84-litre compressor fridge, which also has a small freezer compartment, sits at the end of the kitchen above a small wardrobe. It's a perfectly good size for two – with enough space inside for several days' worth of fresh food.

Beneath the kitchen's top locker there's a mains socket, which is handy to have, but I can't help thinking it would have been better located above the worktop at the other end of the kitchen.

As mentioned previously, the kitchen is compact, and that's especially apparent in the passageway between the kitchen and the washroom opposite. The gap is just 45cm at its narrowest point, which can make accessing the cooker – and particularly the oven – quite awkward, especially if you are on the bigger side yourself.

This is certainly not unique to the Mobilvetta and if you find it a major problem then perhaps consider a different layout.

LOUNGING AROUND

The front dinette/lounge is a really bright place during the day, thanks in no small part to the Heki rooflight and the large panoramic Skyview overcab window, as well as the double-glazed side window and the sliding door. On a sunny day, the space is flooded with light, but, if it gets too hot, the windows can be opened, with flyscreens keeping unwanted bugs out.

If you really need to maximise ventilation, the flyscreen on the side door is a welcome feature, allowing you to open it fully without fear of mozzies or midges joining the party. At night, all the windows have blinds for privacy and the illumination comes from ambient LED lighting. The cab also has pleated blinds.

That Truma heating has two vents in the lounge which should be plenty to keep this part of the 'van cosy when the temperature drops (it's the 4kW, rather than 6kW unit, but that should be OK in this size of 'van).

The half-dinette comprises a couple of forward-facing seats with luxurious two-tone grey leather-effect upholstery. These are fitted with seatbelts and double up as travel seats if you are carrying a couple of passengers.

Another nice design feature is that the dining table can be folded in half to create a more comfortable seating area when travelling, and it has a handy drinks holder built in, too. The folding table also makes it easier for taller people to get in and out from behind the table.

Both cab seats swivel to face into the campervan's living area, allowing four people to sit around the table. A swing-out extension increases the size of the dining table so, if you are sitting on one of the swivelled cab seats, you'll have plenty of legroom and space on the table to tuck into your meal.

Also in the lounge, there are mains, USB, 12V and TV ariel sockets, along with a discreet underfloor cubbyhole, a mini drawer and another overhead locker. In fact, despite the limitations in the kitchen, overall, storage is actually fairly plentiful throughout the 'van.

WASHED UP

Immediately behind the dinette is the modern washroom, where there's a Thetford cassette toilet, a washbasin, a large mirror and plenty of storage space for your travel essentials, including a cupboard, a towel rail and toothbrush holder. At first glance you might be wondering where the shower is – well, you simply open the swing partition and it reveals itself. A very clever use of the limited space.

Outside, the T-handle for emptying the 75-litre grey waste tank is easy to access and simple to operate, so there's no need for faffing around under the 'van searching for the tap before setting off for your next destination.

For off-grid camping, the roof-mounted 200W solar panel will keep your 12V supply topped up.

SLEEP ON IT

The main benefits of a fixed bed campervan are the convenience of having your bed ready to go without a complicated set-up process and the storage it offers at the back of the 'van.

The rear barn doors give access from the outside to the bedroom, where you'll find the fixed beds and storage area. There are two floor levels in the back – that upper level can be removed completely if you don't need it or if you want more room to carry taller items. There are lashing points on the floor to stop items moving around while driving, and small storage pockets in both back doors. The lockers under the offside rear bed can be removed completely and left at home if you don't need them. It only takes a few seconds to put them into position or take them out.

The two comfortable single beds run lengthways and both are 72cm wide, with one 1.80m long and the other 1.90m (approximately 5ft 10in and 6ft 2in for those of us who still think in old money). The

FACT FILE

MOBILVETTA ADMIRAL K6.3
Price £79,995
Base vehicle Fiat Ducato L4 H2 extra-long panel van
Engine 2.3-litre, 140hp, Euro 6E engine with eight-speed automatic gearbox
Berths 2
Travel seats 4
Length 6.36m
Width 2.05m
Height 2.65m
Gross vehicle weight 3,500kg
Payload 376kg

KEY FEATURES

- Can two-burner gas hob and oven/grill
- Thetford 84-litre fridge with freezer compartment
- Rear single bed nearside 1.80m x 0.72m, offside 1.90m x 0.72m
- 85-litre fresh water tank (inboard)
- 75-litre waste water tank (underslung, insulated)
- Truma Combi 4 diesel blown-air heating with hot water
- 2 x 6kg gas cylinders
- 100Ah leisure battery

OPTIONS

- No factory options available for this model

THANK YOU

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MOBILVETTA

VERDICT

This is a high-end campervan that lives up to its high-ranking nautical name and enjoys some innovative features. It's not ideal for the bigger-built buyer – the kitchen is rather narrow – but the Winter Pack makes all-year-round camping a realistic proposition. Its classy interior and black and silver exterior will definitely appeal to those of you who like a little touch of sparkle.

£756.00

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motorhome.ma/QuoteInfo

memory foam mattresses sit on a sprung base for added comfort.

The singles can easily be converted into a double measuring 1.90m at its longest by 1.80m wide. To create the double, simply add the supports, hook the centre panels onto the base of each single bed and lay the spare mattress sections on top.

The Heki rooflight adds natural light in the bedroom during the day, along with the two side windows and the pair of small windows on the back doors, all of which have blinds.

There are dimmable striplights in here which create a nice ambience and reading lights on both sides. And, if you like to drift off to sleep with a musical accompaniment, or perhaps a podcast or audio book, there are speakers in the bedroom, too.

Six decent-sized overhead lockers in the bedroom provide plenty of storage for clothing and there's a half-height wardrobe with a slide-out hanging rail below the fridge.

The gas locker is also at the back, with room for two cylinders. Another feature that will come in handy in warm weather is the outdoor shower at the rear, perfect for cooling down on a hot day or for washing down muddy boots or bikes.

DRIVING FORCE

While the Admiral part of the name is inspired by nautical influences, the 6.3 in the title refers to the van's length – the Admiral is built on a 6.36m-long Fiat Ducato panel van with an automatic gearbox and a 140hp engine.

It's absolutely packed with the latest tech designed to make driving more convenient and stress-free, including a coolbox for your travel snacks and drinks built into the dashboard.

And there's a whole host of driver assistance features, such as USB sockets, cab air-con, cruise control, a rear view camera, stability control and heated electric wing mirrors.

The gross weight is 3,500kg so you can drive it on a standard licence, but the payload is only 376kg, so you will need to be conscious of what you are loading into the 'van.

Lincolnshire is charming but it's a far cry from the Amalfi Coast, and you might think driving around one of the flattest counties in the land wouldn't pose many problems – it's not exactly renowned for mountain passes or spectacular clifftop roads.

However, Lincolnshire does have its own challenges. The small villages, with their narrow roads and vehicles seemingly appearing from nowhere, can be tricky to negotiate and on the open road there are plenty of sharp bends to deal with. To keep that nautical theme going, the Admiral navigated it all with ease. You might describe it as plain sailing!

MOBILVETTA
DESIGN
THE *ULTIMATE*
ADMIRAL

The stylish Admiral van conversion is built on a Fiat chassis and features an automatic 140bhp engine. It offers 2 berths and 4 traveling seats and a generous payload.

The layout includes two large single beds or one big double bed at the rear, a central kitchen and washroom, a front dinette and lounge area utilising the driver and passenger seats.

This campervan is equipped with a Truma Combi 4 heating system, solar panel, 16” alloy wheels, cruise control and speed limiter, awning, winter pack and a comprehensive specification for year round touring.

Whether its short trips or extended stays, the Admiral is a great campervan for all seasons and holidays.

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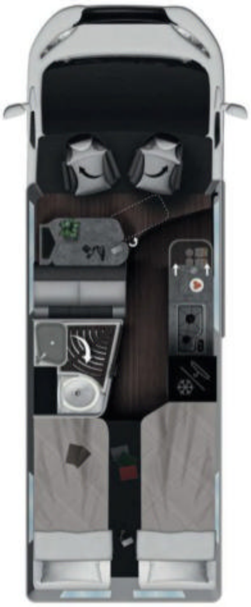

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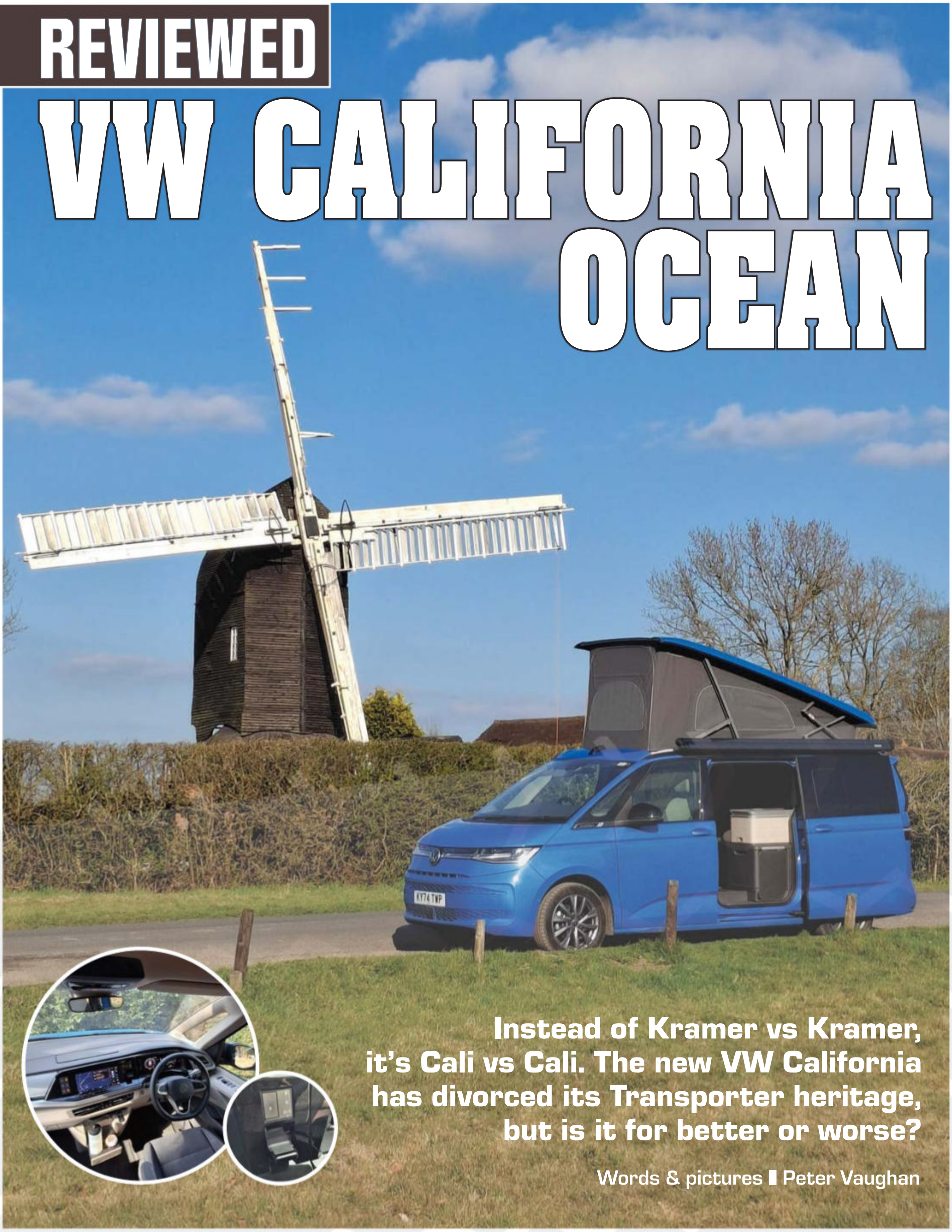
REVIEWED

VW CALIFORNIA OCEAN



Instead of Kramer vs Kramer, it's Cali vs Cali. The new VW California has divorced its Transporter heritage, but is it for better or worse?

Words & pictures ▌Peter Vaughan

The Volkswagen California has been around since 1988, originally built by Westfalia on the T3 and then T4 generations of the Transporter. VW took both its design and build in-house in 2004 with the launch of the T5 Cali, the first one to come here as an official right-hand drive import. Later T6 and T6.1 versions required only the most minor updates to the habitation aspects as sales soared – the Cali has been a huge success story, with 200,000 vehicles sold in less than 20 years, making it the best-selling campervan in Europe.

With the end of T6.1 Transporter production, however, an all-new model was required. Rumours of an all-electric, retro-styled ID Buzz California have so far come to nought and, equally, VW shows no sign of converting the new (Ford-based) Transporter van into a camper.

Instead, the future direction of VW's camper was unveiled at the 2023 Caravan Salon Düsseldorf with the California Concept, based on a Multivan people-carrier. Now the production model is here, albeit without the induction hob and portable barbecue of the concept.

In fact, the new California that you can buy comes in three flavours. The Beach Camper is a five-seater that has a simple slide-out galley in the boot. However, standing under the tailgate to make a cuppa may lose its appeal in Britain in the rain...

Next up is the California Coast, which has the same four-seater/side kitchen design as the top-spec Ocean that we're testing here (note that all the names have been carried over from the T6.1, even if the designs are different). Key differences between Coast and Ocean are the latter's electric (rather than manual) elevating roof, heated cab seats, Discover Pro sat-nav with 10in display plus streaming and internet, power latching for the sliding doors and tailgate, 18in Toshima alloys, ambient interior lighting, LED matrix headlights and some cosmetic details.

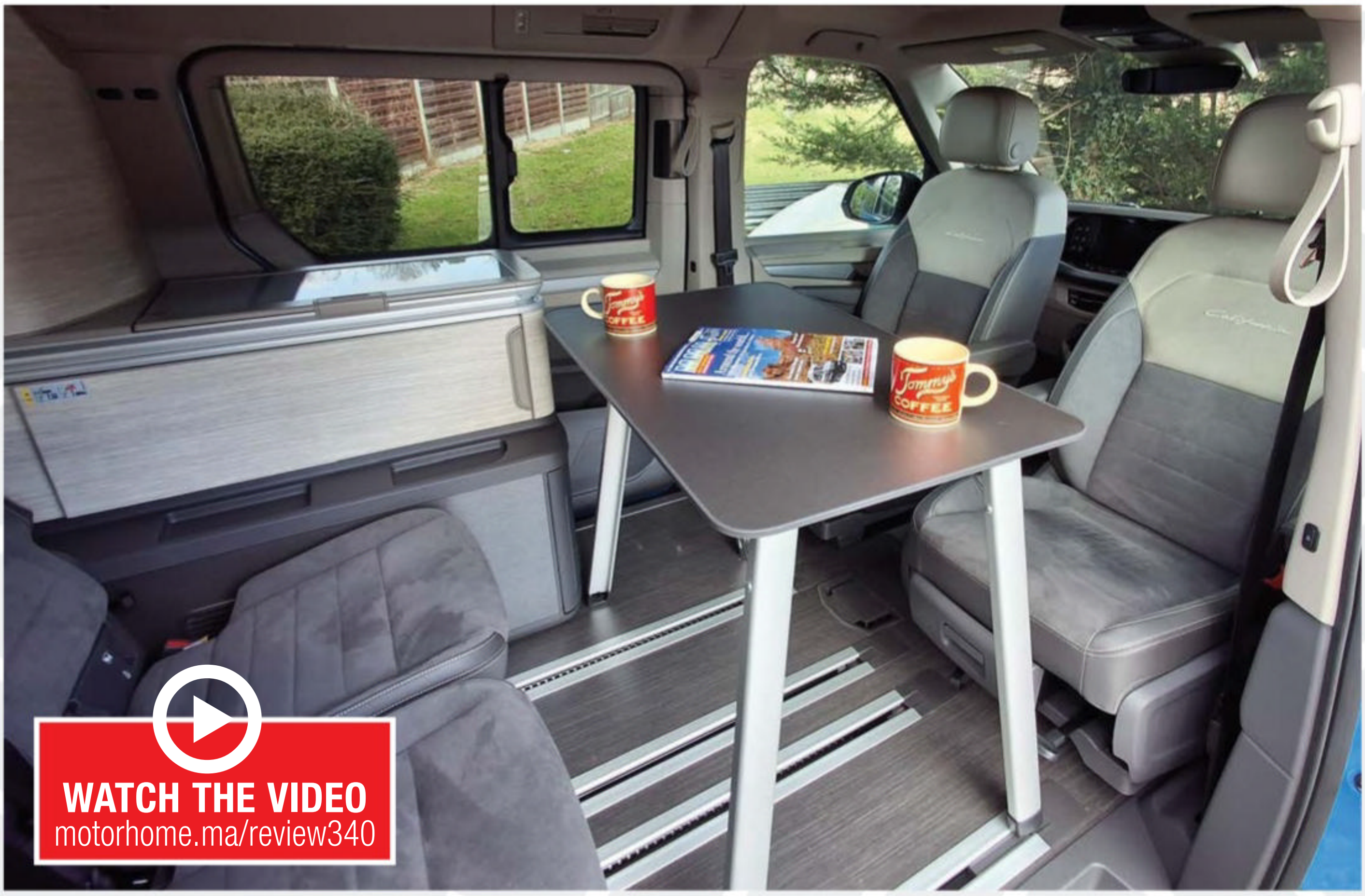
The new Multivan-based California Ocean also comes with a choice of three completely different powertrains, unlike the outgoing TDI-only model. Our test vehicle is the obvious choice – a 2-litre diesel with seven-speed DSG automatic gearbox. However, it comes solely with a 150hp power output, which may disappoint owners of the previous 204hp biturbo T6.1. If you want more performance now, you'll have to swap from the black pump to the green one and order the 2-litre petrol model with 204hp. For budding boy racers, it knocks 2.6 seconds off the 0-62mph dash, reducing it to 10 seconds dead. But the combined fuel

PROS

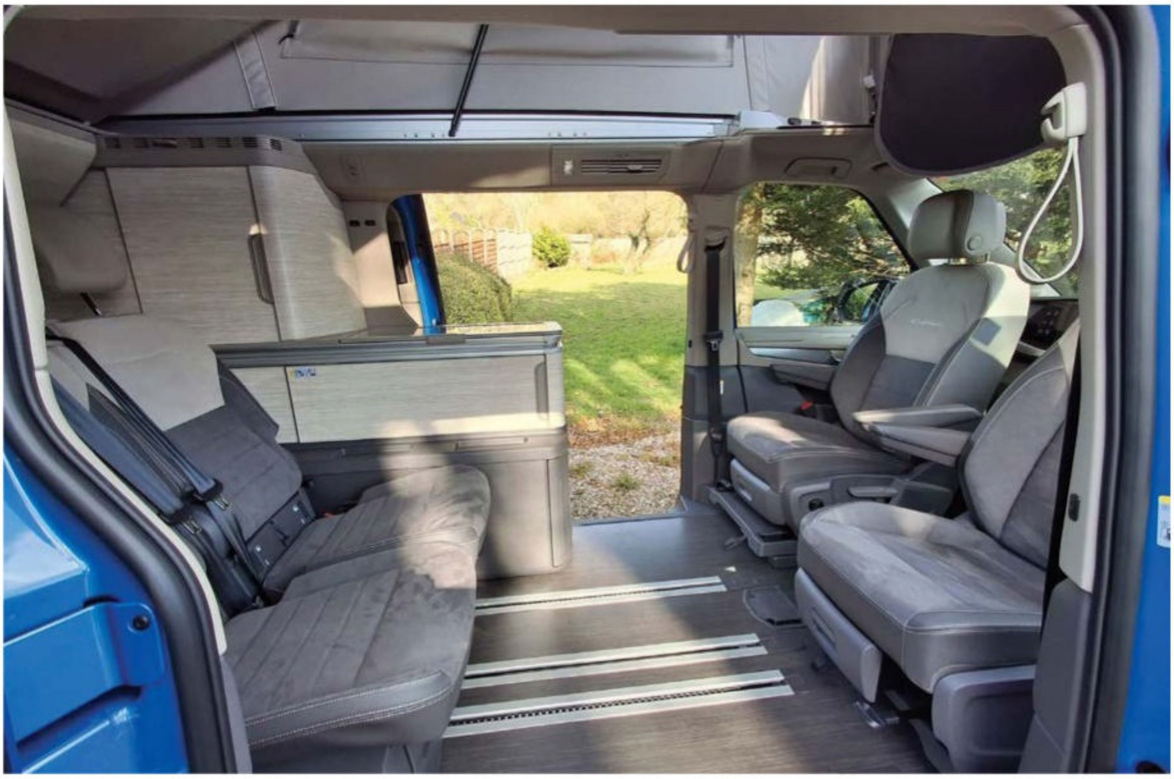
- Great to drive
- Easy-to-access drawer fridge
- Twin sliding doors
- Individual rear passenger seats

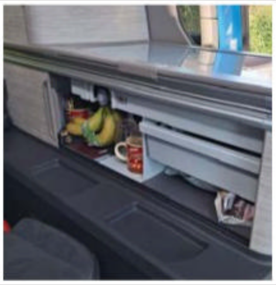
CONS

- Not enough storage
- Less payload than T6.1
- One-burner hob



WATCH THE VIDEO
motorhome.ma/review340





consumption figure is around 10mpg worse, at just over 30, and the petrol version is almost three grand dearer than the diesel.

Later this year, you'll be able pick the third alternative, a petrol/electric plug-in hybrid with 245hp and 4Motion all-wheel drive. We'll be very interested to test the real-world EV range of the eHybrid when it arrives.

Whichever version of the California tempts you, it will come with the 5+ Promise – five services (and three MoTs), five years' warranty and five years of roadside assistance.

DIESEL DO NICELY

So, the new California is no longer based on a van. In fact, the Multivan uses Volkswagen's MQB platform which has sired around 60 different models, from Polo to Passat and including Audis, Seats and Škodas. Using an MPV or people-carrier as its base should give the new model a real USP – and added sophistication. Other OEM campervans – Mercedes Marco Polo, Ford Nugget and Citroën Holidays – all have closer links to commercial vehicles.

The Cali has also grown bigger. Length is the most notable change, going from 4.90m to 5.17m. Width has expanded a tad, too, from 1.90m to 1.94m (excluding mirrors), but crucially this campervan remains untroubled by height barriers with an overall figure of 1.97m.

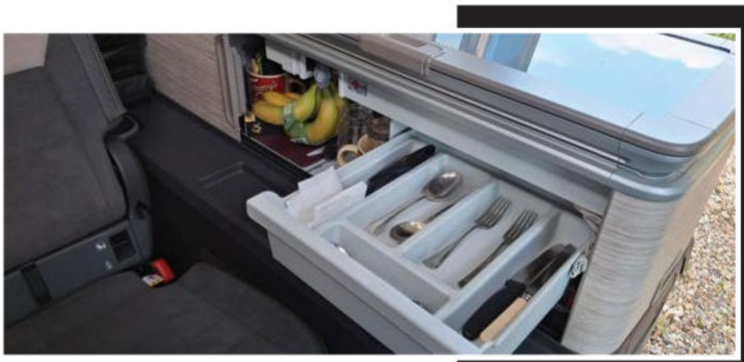
It's also still a vehicle that you can drive on a standard Class B car licence, and its maximum gross weight has actually reduced from 3,080kg to 2,850kg. Payload has also dropped by around 100kg, so you'll have to be aware of that if you ever travel with four adults on board.

When camping, though, it's more likely to be just a couple of grown-ups or, perhaps, a two-plus-two family. In which case, the driver is in for a treat. The T6 and T6.1 were great vans but they were still vans. The new Cali moves things on by some margin simply because it isn't a van.

Of course, the new Cali is a real step forward when you're using it as a car and one of the key strengths of a vehicle like this is that it can be used every day, taking the kids to school, going to the supermarket or popping to the office. From the moment you sit behind the fully adjustable wheel and adjust the seat, its armrests and electric lumbar support, you feel like you're in a premium vehicle – more Audi than Škoda. Little details like the aluminium fillets on the doors and dash and the padded leatherette sections on the door tops make a big difference.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FEATURES

The instrumentation is fully digital and there's a 10in screen for the radio and navigation, while Android Auto and Apple CarPlay link wirelessly. Cruise control (adaptive, of course) and radio controls are mounted on the steering wheel, which, like the seats, comes with three-stage heating. The stereo, meanwhile, has eight speakers and the subtle blue illumination around the cab for night-time driving turns to red if a door is opened, or green if you



receive a phone call. My teenage daughter described that feature as "sick", which apparently is a very good thing!

I was more taken with the IQ Light LED matrix headlights, which gave remarkable visibility and dipped only the necessary elements to avoid blinding oncoming traffic – clever and more likely to improve safety than all the electronic nannying.

You can't avoid all the latest assistance gismos these days, so the California has Driver Alert, Front Assist, Dynamic Road Sign Display, Park Assist and Travel Assist. Mostly, they're not too obtrusive, but they're not infallible. The Cali was convinced that a local derestricted road had a 30mph limit and reprimanded me for speeding. Then, when reversing towards a speed bump, it jammed the brakes on hard, thinking I was going to crash.

The design of the touchscreen isn't perfect, either, with it being far too easy to inadvertently alter the air-con temperature when fiddling with the radio. Please bring back physical switches.

There's keyless entry and keyless starting – just keep the fob in your pocket and press the button marked 'Engine'. No need for a conventional gear stick, either, just flick down the chunky switch between the two digital displays to engage drive, or push it up for reverse. And here's where things get really interesting to campervanners because the T6.1's floor-mounted parking brake (awkwardly in the way between the seats) has gone; now it's an electric parking brake that releases automatically.

On the road, the new California is impressive. Smooth, quiet and comfortable, it's everything you'd want it to be, whether you're nipping out for milk or heading to the Côte d'Azur.

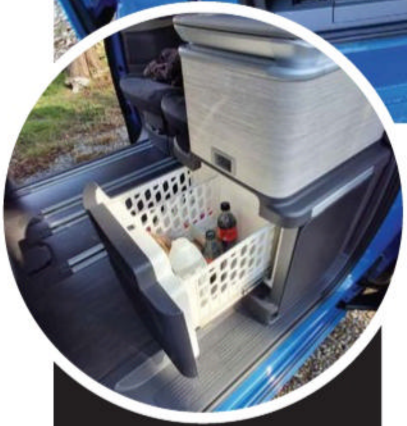
The phrase "car-like" has been hugely overused in campervanland over the years but here it isn't just car-like, it is a car. Even my gripe about a slightly tardy pick-up from stationary was soon eliminated

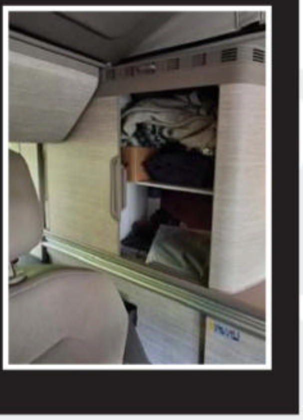
FACT FILE

VW MULTIVAN CALIFORNIA OCEAN
Price from £77,581
Price as tested £82,138
Berths 4
Travel seats 4
Length 5.17m
Width 1.94m
Height 1.97m
Gross weight 2,850kg
Payload 413kg
Base vehicle VW Multivan, 150hp, seven-speed DSG automatic
Fridge 37 litres, drawer-style, compressor
Beds Lower bed 1.99m x 1.06m, roof bed 2.05m x 1.12m
Fresh water 29 litres (inboard)
Heating Diesel blown-air
Leisure battery 2 x 40Ah lithium

OPTIONS
Fitted to test vehicle: ArtVelours upholstery (£1,230), electric sliding doors with Easy Open (£1,200), anthracite-coloured alloys (£300), Medium Blue paint (£984) and a retractable towbar (£948)

➡





by selecting sport mode. Sport mode in a campervan, whatever next?

Understandably, the motoring press has been very excited by the new model. *Autocar* magazine declared, "VW's vast experience with campervans is very obvious and employed brilliantly", while *Top Gear* said, "As expected, the California remains a brilliant campervan." We've had to wait longer than them to get our hands on the new camper but we won't be blinded by the fact that it's nicer to drive, so we set off not only to camp in it but to park it side by side with its predecessor.

MORE DOORS, LESS KITCHEN

The biggest criticism of the old California, whether T5, T6 or T6.1, was that the door was on the "wrong" side. Of course, if you parked in the street in the UK, you'd have your rear passengers alighting into the middle of the road – not ideal, but you'd have exactly the same issue taking your UK camper onto the Continent.

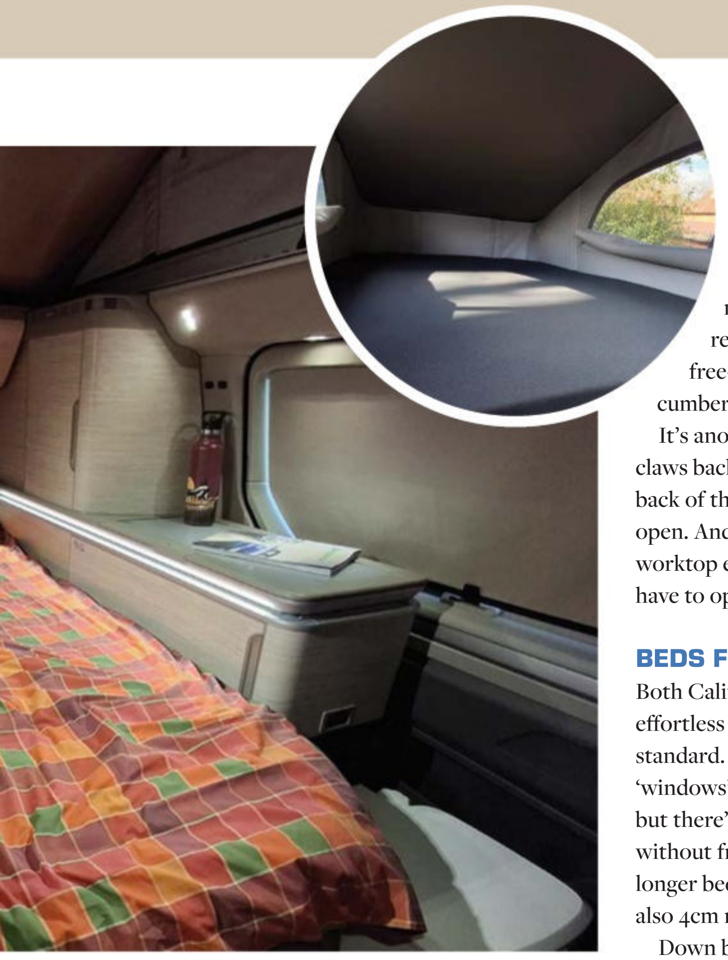
Well, wherever you are the new California solves that because it has sliding doors on both sides. Not only that but our test vehicle had electric sliding doors with Easy Open – a £1,200 option that allows you to remotely open either door from the key fob. My 11-year-old lad thought that was cool – "sick" doesn't seem to be in his vocabulary yet.

It also means that the (standard) Thule sunshade awning is now on the nearside and that you could also use a free-standing awning on either side.

The California's kitchen is still on our nearside but, to allow access through the door here, it has become considerably shorter. There are further pluses to that, though. The recline on the passenger cab chair is no longer restricted by the galley behind, while the fridge (now a drawer-style unit in the end of the kitchen) can easily be reached from outside. It's a slightly smaller cooler than before but imagine the convenience of parking your Tesco trolley alongside and loading the beer straight in.

The Cali kitchen is still a smart-looking bit of kit but its glass worktop (now much more compact) reverts to a single lid. Lift it and you'll be

ON THE ROAD, THE NEW CALIFORNIA IS IMPRESSIVE. SMOOTH, QUIET AND COMFORTABLE, IT'S EVERYTHING YOU'D WANT IT TO BE



disappointed to find just one gas burner and a rather shallow sink.

More worrying is the considerable loss of storage space below. Sliding doors are retained for the furniture (easy to access wherever the seats are) but the one under the hob and sink reveals a large cutlery drawer and room (only just) for a couple of mugs, bowls, plates, a small kettle and the dolls' house-sized VW-branded saucepan.

There is more stowage space towards the rear, where the furniture is taller, but the new Cali loses the old model's wardrobe and vanity mirror. More importantly, the T6.1 had a large – and very useful – drawer under its rear bench seat, while the new one has just a tiny pull-out plastic cubby under each individual rear seat.

SEPARATE SEATS

Of course, the back seats mark another significant change when comparing Multivan and T6.1 Californias – you could say they're Oceans apart. The older camper had a bench seat for two that slid on covered tracks in the floor. It was infinitely more comfortable than the RIB unit beloved of so many VW converters but it was still just a bench seat.

The new California puts passenger comfort to the fore with two separate rear seats that slide and recline individually. It's another aspect that makes the new camper great as a car, although its open rails for the seats will need regular vacuuming out.

When you're camping, both front seats in both campers rotate easily enough. Then, in the T6.1, you slide the table along the front of the kitchen and simply lift it to the horizontal and unfurl its leg – easy. In the new model, you have to go outside and retrieve the table from the boot and, as it's a free-standing unit, it's a bit too high and rather cumbersome inside the vehicle.

It's another win for the T6.1 but the new model claws back points for its mini table that clips to the back of the galley with the nearside sliding door open. And this can also be used as a much-needed worktop extension on the end of the galley, but you have to open the door to get it.

BEDS FOR FOUR

Both Californias have an electric pop-top that's effortless to use and each has a sprung roof bed as standard. In each case there are flyscreened 'windows' with covers at the front and on each side but there's no way of getting daylight in either without fresh air, too. The newcomer claims the longer bed (a whopping 2.05m) but its mattress is also 4cm narrower.

Down below, the T6.1's rear seat slides forward and folds flat. It takes seconds and leaves plenty of floor space at the front to undress, or to park a loo. The new camper's bed is more involved as you first slide each rear seat forward and flatten it, then unfold a three-section mattress over the top. Again, it's a longer but narrower bed, as well as one that leaves very limited floor space – having a loo for night-time use is near impossible. Both Calis have firm beds but, while the T6.1 has plenty of room to stow a mattress topper, you don't really have that luxury in the new one.

Where the latest California scores is with a good range of dimmable interior lighting, all controlled by the neat touchscreen mounted on the wall next to the rear seat. Like its predecessor, VW's new camper has blinds for the side windows and tailgate. In the cab, side windows are covered by screens that attach with magnets – clever. The windscreen's cover is a bit tent-like, with five slot-in poles but, although fiddly, it does an effective job of blackout.

The new touchscreen also allows easy monitoring of water and battery levels (now twin lithium batteries), as well as controlling the diesel heating and fridge.

PUT THE BOOT IN

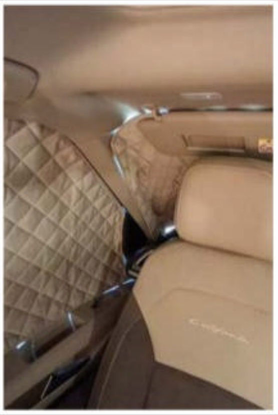
The rear boot is a vital aspect in campervans like these as it's where you'll keep your bulkiest gear. In the Multivan, you see the impact of having to stow the three-piece mattress for the bed – it eats into your upper-level stowage, leaving room here for a duvet, but not much more.

VERDICT

It wouldn't be hard to fall for the new California's looks (especially with the optional – expensive! – duo-tone paint) and you'll be smitten if you take a test drive. Any thoughts of driving a builder's van are suddenly banished to the history books, while the living area has the same integrated, automotive look as its forebear – just with perhaps even more sophistication.

And yet, the Multivan is bigger on the road but seems smaller iinside. The twin sliding doors are great on a car but cause the kitchen to be too small, too lacking in facilities. And, while the rear seats are fantastic when travelling, they lose storage and make bed make-up less satisfactory.

Those seeking a day van, or contemplating just single-night stops en route to a holiday home will love the latest California and all of its added modernity. But we are campervanners and on longer trips away the new California's dearth of storage will simply be a compromise too far.



REVIEWED

ADRIA TWIN
60 YEARS SELECTION

SELECTION
60

ADRIA
TWIN
60

WATCH THE VIDEO
motorhome.ma/AdriaTwin60

A special edition two-berth campervan packed with extras

Words & pictures
Daniel Attwood

Adria is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this year and, to mark this milestone, it has launched three special edition models – one campervan and two coachbuilt motorhomes.

Here we focus on the only campervan in this anniversary range – the Adia Twin 60 Years Selection.

This unique campervan is based on the best-selling two-berth Twin Supreme 640 SGX. The layout is already familiar to many Adria fans and has proved to be popular throughout Europe with couples looking for a well-equipped two-berth campervan that is just 6.36m long, meaning it is easy to manoeuvre in tight spots and compact enough (it's just 2.05m wide) to negotiate narrow country lanes.

As it is based on the 3,500kg Fiat Ducato, it can be driven by anyone with a standard car driving licence and, as it has four full belted travel seats, it can be used as a daily family car during the week and a campervan at weekends and holidays.

The highlight of the layout is the rear transverse double bed that can be raised or lowered electrically to create a large garage beneath (large enough for cycles or other bulky gear), which is accessed by double doors. As befitting a special edition model, Adria has fitted this bed with its premium Evopore foam mattress.

Forward of the bedroom is the washroom on the offside and the kitchen on the nearside. The washroom features Adria's Duplex Bathroom system that utilises a very clever swivel wall system to create a full-sized shower room when needed and then back into a washroom with swivel loo when the shower is no longer needed.

The kitchen opposite is also well equipped and will come with an oven as standard, as well as a two-burner gas hob, sink and compact fridge. There is even a special 60Y chopping board in the kitchen!

The front lounge has a traditional two-seat (both with seatbelts) half-dinette with a new premium wood table with extension and cup holder. This relaxing area is also bathed in light during the daytime thanks to the panoramic roof window and, come evening time, the windscreen and cab door blinds can be closed and the controllable lighting system with LEDs and spotlights comes into its own.

Heating and hot water are courtesy of Webasto's diesel heating system (even the waste water tank is heated to prevent freezing while touring in the winter), while the standard lithium leisure battery, which saves weight compared to a lead acid battery, provides greater flexibility for those who prefer to stay off-grid.

Other pieces of equipment include a TV holder, a flyscreen on the sliding door, Adria's Media Nav Pack and Mach app, an electric converter and Fiat's 140bhp engine coupled with an automatic transmission.

But what really sets this interior apart from that of the standard Twin Supreme 640 SGX is the exclusive Limited Edition 60Y upholstery, textiles and furniture, which are only available in this anniversary model.

On the exterior there is an awning, as well as exterior 60Y graphics that complement Fiat's metallic Artense Grey exterior paint and which make it instantly recognisable as a special edition model.

Also on the exterior are additional features including 16in bicolour alloy wheels, colour-coded bumpers, a black skid plate and even front fog lights.

Priced at £75,945, this limited edition Twin is already at Adria dealers throughout the UK but is available only in limited numbers.

PROS

- £11,000-worth of additional equipment as standard
- Proven best-selling layout
- Unique exterior paint and extras

CONS

- Only available in limited numbers
- No pop-top option

FACT FILE

Base vehicle Fiat Ducato
Price from £75,945
Berths 2
Travel seats 4
Length 6.36m
Width 2.05m
Height 2.60m
Gross weight 3,500kg
Payload 371kg (est)

VERDICT

With a huge amount of extra equipment as standard and based on a best-selling layout, there is little to dislike about this special edition campervan

GET INTO GEAR

Check out our round-up of the latest campervan and outdoor accessories

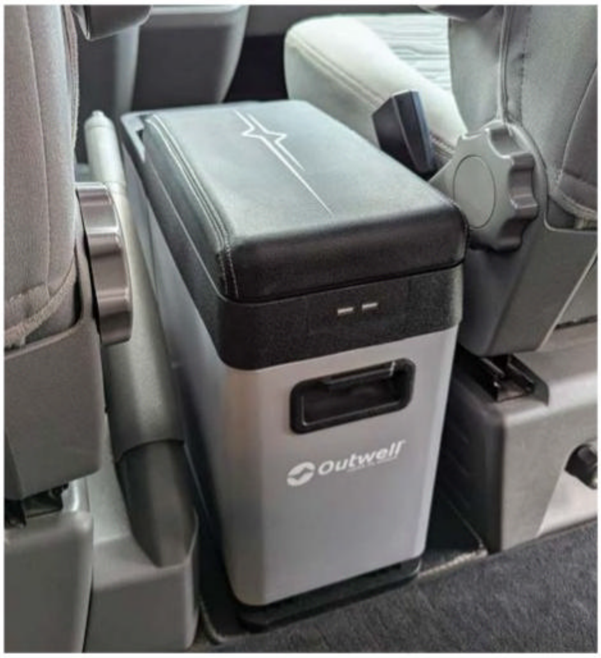
SWISS LUXX ELECTRIC BBQ 800W

There's nothing better than cooking outside on a warm summer evening, or being able to do a full fry-up without filling the campervan interior with bacon smoke. Or maybe you want to supplement a limited hob set-up in a more compact kitchen. How about this great-value mini electric barbecue, which is currently under £14?

Compact and lightweight, the 800W grill is perfect for those who enjoy both the great outdoors and al fresco dining. Weighing 2.5kg and with a maximum dimension of 35cm, it won't take up a huge amount of storage space as a 'just in case' option.

It has removable parts for easy cleaning, ensuring you spend less time on maintenance and more time enjoying your culinary creations. Whether you're a seasoned traveller or a weekend explorer, the Swiss Luxx Electric BBQ can provide a convenient grilling experience for all your adventures.

PRICE **£16.70**
W **motorhome.ma/Electricbbq**



OUTWELL ARCTIC CHILL 8

As summer rolls around and the mercury soars (hopefully), keeping food and drink chilled when you are on the road becomes more and more important. Even if you have a fridge in your campervan, there's nothing quite like having easy access to cold drinks from the driver's seat. Camping equipment manufacturer, Outwell, has come up with a solution as part of its new range of accessories that have been specially designed for campervans.

New for 2025 is the Arctic Chill 8, a 12V compressor cooler specifically designed to fit between the driver and passenger seats of a VW Transporter (although it will fit other vans as well, just make sure you check the dimensions).

The Arctic Chill has a capacity of eight litres and will cool the contents down to a very chilly -20°C. It has a soft-padded lid and integrated handles, which make it easy to lift out. It also includes a digital touch panel for easy temperature control, and this can be adjusted remotely using the Outwell app. You can even use it to charge USB devices and it has a wireless phone charging port as well – so it's truly multipurpose.

PRICE **£277.99**
W **amzn.to/3H1NWww**

COLLAPSIBLE DOG WATER BOWLS

The dog bowl might seem like a product that's reached the end of its design journey. Now someone has come up with the idea of a portable bowl and asked why the dog couldn't carry it themselves.

This product is two bowls, made from ABS plastic, folded into a disc shape, with a hook-hole to easily attach to your canine companion's collar. At 120g in weight we can forget it being an inconvenience to your dog. Don't get me wrong, they'll be aware it's there. But from our personal experience of dogs, there will not be a care in the world. Plus, it's just £7.49 to make feeding and watering your dog an easy process while away from the 'van.

PRICE £7.49
W amzn.to/4itLY52

CAMPING CABLE ORGANISER BAG

Whether it's a phone charger or a hosepipe, it's easy for all manner of cables to get tangled and, not to be dramatic, ruin your life. While travelling in your 'van, life can be unruined thanks to a simple organiser bag for your hook-up cable, able to keep 25m of cable in one convenient disc shape.

Did we mention the bag is durable and waterproof, too? Keep all cables, pipes and hoses in one organised and tidy place for £16; it's one less frustration to be able to rant about at the campsite's washing-up sinks.

PRICE £16
W motorhome.ma/ Mainsleadbag

HELINOX CHAIR ONE (RE)

They say the best things come in small packages and, in the case of the Helinox Chair One, it may actually be true.

This company is known for its lightweight and compact outdoor chairs and the latest Chair One (re), a new version of its best-selling design, is no exception.

Let's talk figures first – it weighs 1.12kg with bag. Packed away, it only takes up 13.5cm by 39cm by 12cm of space, so, even if you've got the smallest campervan or you carry a lot of stuff, you should be able to find space for these chairs.

This redesigned version should be comfier, too, thanks to a new design in the fabric that better distributes weight around the frame when you perch your behind. It's also taller so more suited for those whose limbs can't limbo anymore.

The weight limit is 145kg (22¾ stone in human weight terms), while an integrated side pocket is handy. The price is £109.95 and it comes in a range of bright colours (as well as more boring ones); we'd go with Mint Multi Block (orange, mint and khaki), but you can pick the classic Black one (with blue frame) for a more subtle look.

PRICE £109.95
W fave.co/4Idrjor

CARAWASH 12V PORTABLE 20L JET WASHER

leis
ACCES
20L

Not all of us can clean the campervan within easy distance of a hosepipe or mains supply. This product, priced at around £66, can help solve that problem.

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